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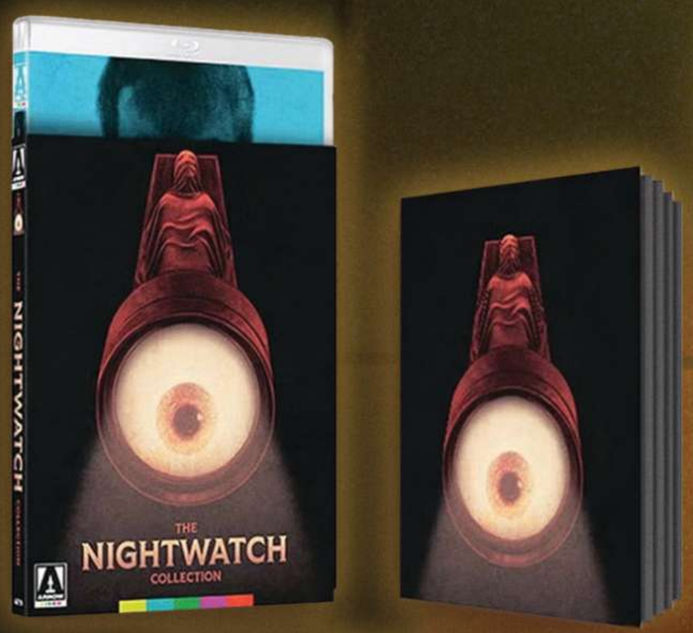

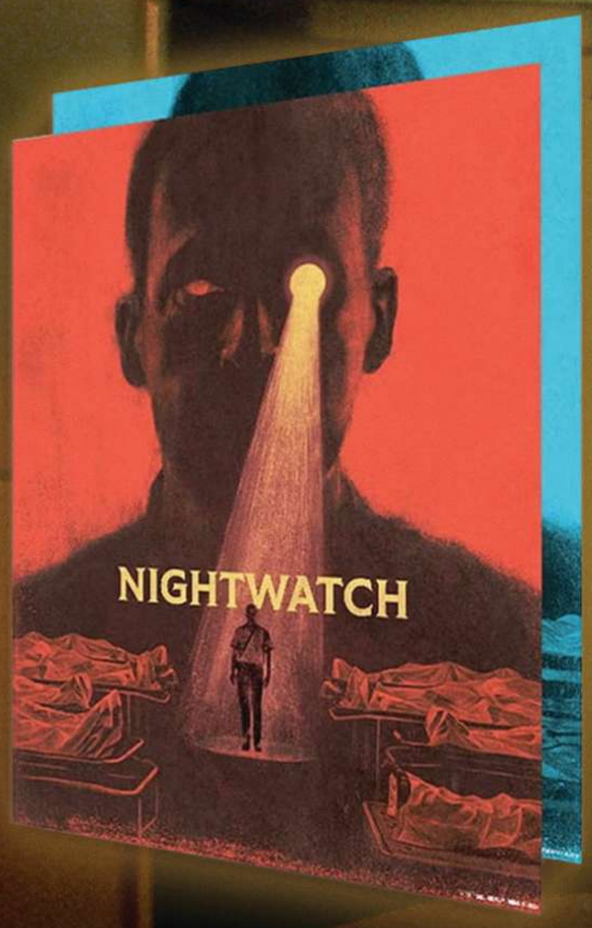

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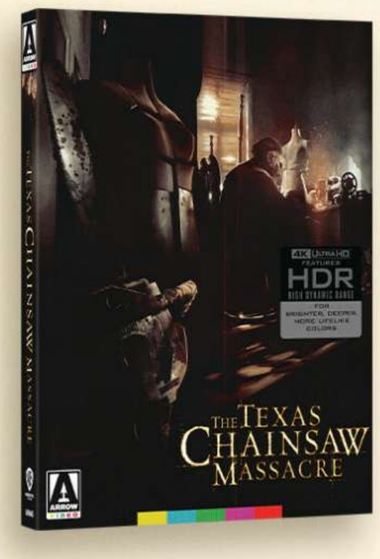

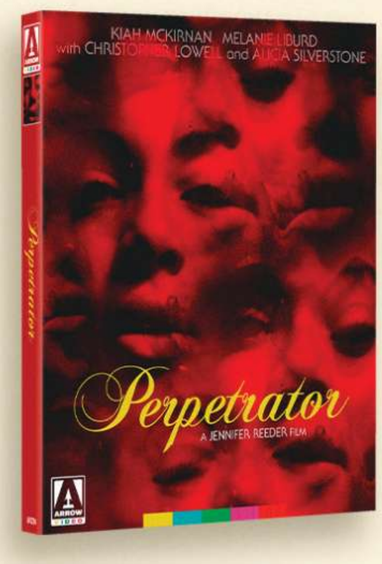

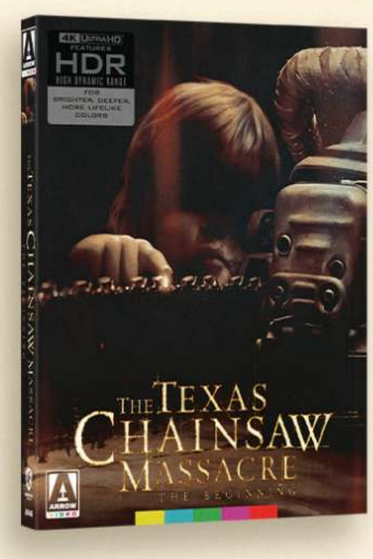
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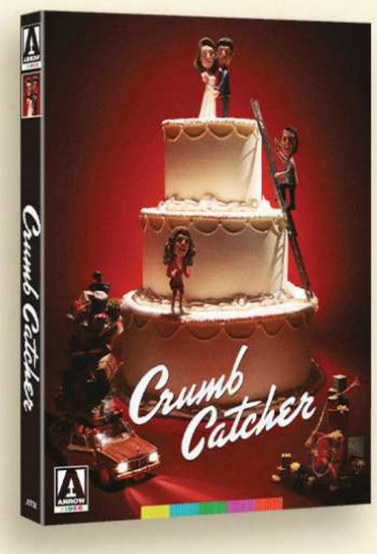

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ON OUR COVER: (SUBSCRIBER VARIANT) *THE TOXIC AVENGER* PHOTO BY YANA BLAJEVA, COURTESY OF LEGENDARY AND CINEVERSE // (NEWSTAND VARIANT) *28 YEARS LATER* PHOTO BY MIYA MIZUNO COURTESY OF SONY PICTURES

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This issue is dedicated to Chris Emmanouilides, Val Kilmer, Ted Kotcheff, Robert McRobert, Rosanna Norton, Ella Mae Smith, Priscilla Pointer, Maryann VanFossen and George Wendt.

ALL UNCREDITED PHOTOS FROM FANGORIA VAULT

INVOCATION

You, Me, and IP

I got a little spooked at the table of contents for this issue. Six of the new releases featured in FANGORIA #28, including both cover stories, are either reboots, remakes, sequels or requels (still not sure what a requel is, but I'm a good little cog in the hype machine). I could hear the old heads bemoaning this glut of IP-driven product. I could also hear other old heads yelling at me for not covering the franchises of Fango's glory days. Lastly, I could hear those five old heads who always decry the inclusion of a *Jurassic Park/World* movie in FANGORIA, despite those films being faithfully and breathlessly covered by this mag since 1993.

I digress. Horror is, as I've said before, bigger now than it maybe ever has been, and surely there's enough original genre fare to keep the lights on around here? Short answer: sure. And you'll find plenty of it in the pages that follow: Kiyoshi Kurosawa's *Cloud*, Paul Etheredge's *The Other*, and the horror comedy *Found Footage* all make this an exciting quarter for original horror. But I submit that the IP relaunches we're covering here are no less special, at least in theory (as usual, I'm forced to present most of these films to you without having seen them). Danny Boyle returning to direct *28 Years Later* is an exciting event, a top-tier director returning to a horror masterpiece a quarter century later. A remake of *The Toxic Avenger* by one of our most talented contemporary storytellers, on paper, makes no sense at all... until you see it, and realize that Macon Blair's unique sensibilities are really just a click or two over from Tromaville. Fans celebrated when Jennifer Love Hewitt and Freddie Prinze Jr. announced their return for *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, and we've even got their bylines on the masthead this issue. The idea of long-form maestro Noah Hawley tackling the *Alien* universe is compelling as hell, especially for fans who've always wanted to dive deeper into that world. And Gareth Edwards, who helped reinvent monster movie language fifteen years ago, is probably exactly what's needed for the *Jurassic World* franchise.

And so on. Certainly, there are IP cash grabs out there, and we've certainly covered them. But horror remakes have existed nearly as long as horror films; by 1920, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* had been adapted over ten times. And despite my initial reaction to this issue's volume of familiar contents, thanks to an incredibly talented crop of filmmakers, there's every chance that the films contained herein are quite original indeed.

Phil Nobile Jr., Editor-in-Chief

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TRIBUTE TO A FANGO MAMA

Starting back in 1982, my mother would either bring FANGORIA home for me, or let me go to the magazine stand in the grocery store to get the latest issue every time I went with her. She passed last year, and those are very special memories to me.

As a reader for over 40 years, I knew when I decided to do an '80s horror sleeve at the age of 54, the Fango logo had to be part of it. Bright and Bold. It's by Ray Bigness of Artisan Tattoo. - Jack VanFossen

That's so amazing, Jack. Everyone at Fango sends our condolences to you and your family. As you and I have discussed elsewhere, we had this in common - the incredible good fortune of a parent who encouraged our love of horror, and who let us know it was okay to do our own thing. I'm so grateful for people like your mom; we've dedicated this issue to her. This one's for you, Mrs. VanFossen. - PN

ALL THE BEST COSPLAYERS LOVE FANGO...

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HORROR TO ESCAPE THE HORRORS

As I write this, the news is playing on the TV at work and the crawl across the bottom of the screen is some of the most horrifying things to happen in my lifetime. The talking heads are laughingly trying to convince me it'll all be okay if I just budget my groceries better while the crawl tells me about another shooting. It's all a very real life nightmare, and it makes me more than ever thankful to everyone who works at or writes for FANGORIA. You guys are giving us all a place to escape from the real-life horrors.

I've been reading Fango since Issue 69 because I wanted to know how you could win Freddy's sweater (I was too late) and now I read it because it's always felt more like home than anyplace else I've ever been. Thank you to everyone who still gives us a safe place to be who we are. - Jason Lees

Jason, that's so kind of you to say, and it really makes us feel good that Fango can be that for you. As for the state of the world, I once worked on a TV show about doomsday preppers, and one of the writers who'd studied that movement noted that humans' brains are wired to think we'll be present for the end of the world. I know that seems truer now than ever, but it has yet to happen. The good and bad times ebb and flow, darkness and light take turns dominating, and I have to believe, as a character on a TV show once said, that the light is winning. Let's hope so. - PN

RICHIE (CHARLIE TAHAN), ALEXANDER (JAMIE CAMPBELL BOWER), EMILY (MADISON ISEMAN) AND CHRISTIAN (AARON DOMINGUEZ) PREPARE TO COMMUNE.

TAKE A SPIN ON THIS WITCHBOARD

CHUCK RUSSELL REMAKES THE 1986 OUIJA HORROR.

By Michael Gingold

On February 27, 1987, *A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors* opened, marking the beginning of Chuck Russell's directorial career. Two weeks later, Kevin S. Tenney's *Witchboard* went wide in theaters, becoming a sleeper hit. So it's sort of a coming-full-circle that Russell has helmed and co-written (with Greg McKay) the new take on *Witchboard* that hits theaters August 15 from The Avenue and Atlas Distribution.

"You know, I didn't remember that," Russell says when Fango chats with him and his cast, following *Witchboard*'s world premiere at Montreal's Fantasia International Film Festival. "I've been hearing that in interviews, where apparently we were on a top 10 chart together. I was obsessed with my own film at the time, and I didn't discover *Witchboard* until later, on television or maybe VHS back in the day. But it's one of those movies you can't unsee, that sticks in pop culture as resonant; it created a subgenre of Ouija board movies, which there have been plenty of. When I was offered the property about five years ago, I thought, 'It's perfect.' It was similar to the reimagining I did with *The Blob* [1988], where there was something fun in pop culture that could be a base for reinventing that franchise and doing something very imaginative with it."

Part of that reinvention involved the titular totem itself. It's not the traditional version popularized by Parker Brothers and Hasbro, but a circular "pendulum board" that's discovered by New Orleanian Emily (Madison Iseman). She decides it would be a fine decoration for the restaurant she's about to open with her fiancé Christian (Aaron Dominguez), and when it helps her find an engagement ring she's lost, she becomes intrigued – and then obsessed – with its spiritual properties. Of course, those qualities have a sinister side,

WRITER/DIRECTOR CHUCK RUSSELL (CENTER) ENTERS THE FRAY.

"I was obsessed with doing something that had legitimate, positive mystical science and negative mystical science. I wanted a balance; I didn't just want a bunch of pentagrams. I don't think that's interesting." - Chuck Russell

and she and the people around her become threatened by both dark forces and other people who also covet the board.

"The pendulum board is a direct-lineage predecessor to the Ouija board," Russell explains. "It's a legit part of history, and in researching the occult, I've always been fascinated with pendulum boards, because there are astrological signs, there are ancient mystical signs, it has Yes and No. You can see how it evolved eventually into the Ouija board, primarily because the French Pope killed people who had them in the 1700s. They were outlawed, and you could be burned at the stake. It was a big element in the witch trials. I think that's a startling fact, and it made me feel bold about reinventing the series."

There aren't a lot of horror movies set in restaurants, and Russell felt this location would provide both a distinctive and appropriate milieu to set his reinvention apart. "There's a little bit of foodie horror in the film," he says with a grin. "I always wonder what the ingredients actually are, even at the finer restaurants, so I felt that was an element that could be fun and visual to play with. I also didn't want to be formulaic. I didn't want it to be, you know, a bunch of people living in the same apartment, like *Friends*, except they're dying one at a time. I wanted to capture that moment that can be very magical, right after school, where you're bonded with a few close friends, before families take us into other responsibilities, and you say, 'It's us against the world. Let's open our own café. We can do it in New Orleans, the most competitive restaurant town in the world, because we believe in our friend who's a great chef.'"

He continues, "I love that idea, and it gave me a positive core where the light against the darkness is the bond of their friendship. And Aaron, who I believe comes from a very artistic family, was one of the only actors I believed as a chef that his friends would invest their futures in."

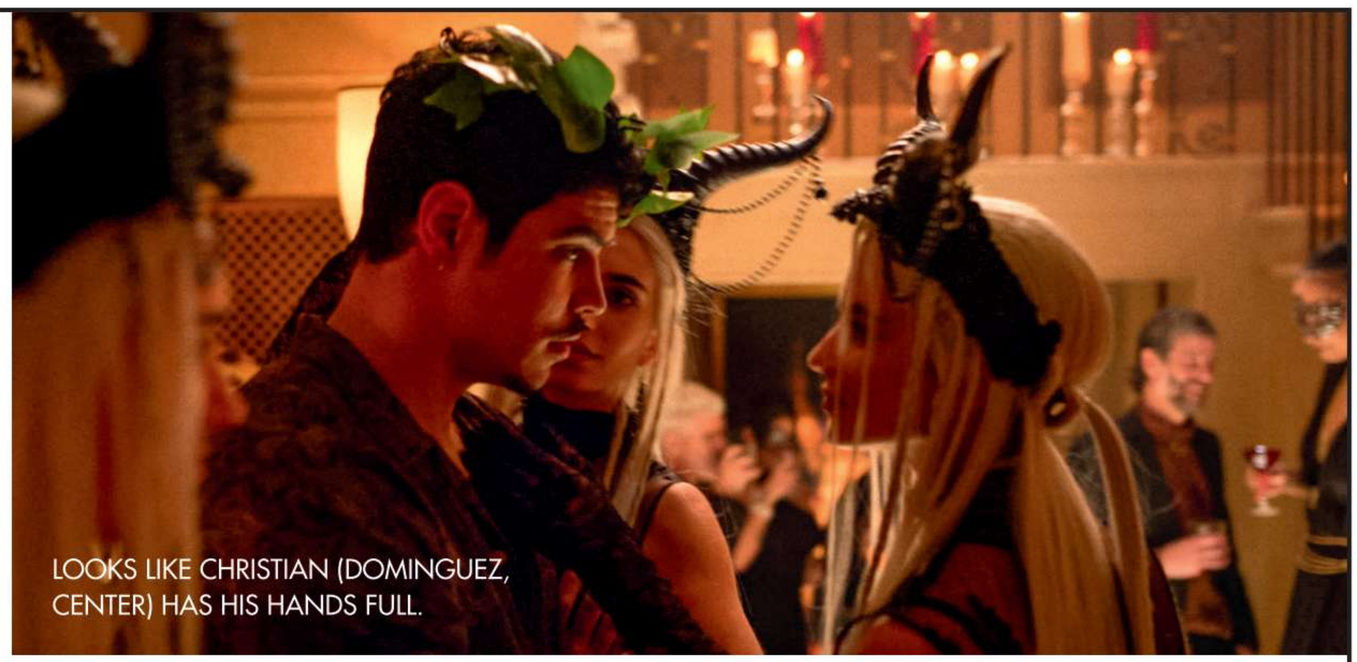
"I know my way around a kitchen," acknowledges Dominguez, "just from my own Caribbean and Latino background. But every time we had kitchen scenes, I liked to

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ATLAS DISTRIBUTION

sit in there, even while they were prepping and cameras were moving around. People would be like, 'Hey, Aaron, could you go back to holding?' I'd say, 'No, I want to sit in the space, so I can see what my character's doing.' Like, why am I grabbing this? Why am I cutting this here? I wanted to make it feel organic and authentic for myself."

"I don't know my way around a kitchen; I know my way around a microwave," laughs Charlie Tahan, who plays Richie, one of Christian's friends and staff. "So I was nervous about that. For me, the biggest challenge of this movie was probably trying to please Chuck with how I would cut up vegetables – which I failed at, and it's not in the movie. But when I came in, they had already been shooting a little bit, and there was a camaraderie on set that helped."

Without giving too much away, Tahan had to spend a little time in another "kitchen": the makeup effects department run by Bruno Gatien. "That was really fun," he says. "It was amazing getting to see the special effects house. I went in and did some preliminary work, and a molding of some… parts [*everyone laughs*]. It wasn't something I'd done before, and I've always been fascinated by that stuff. I'm a big fan of practical effects."



LOOKS LIKE CHRISTIAN (DOMINGUEZ, CENTER) HAS HIS HANDS FULL.

So is Russell, who helmed *Nightmare 3* and *The Blob* before the digital-effects revolution and believes, "CGI is a great tool, but in horror, practical will always be a little scarier. CGI, we use for finishing touches."

One of the key physical props is the board itself, which Russell designed in tandem with the film's art department. "I was obsessed with doing something that had legitimate, positive mystical science and negative mystical science," he explains. "I wanted a balance; I didn't just want a bunch of pentagrams. I don't think that's interesting. But it's very intriguing to watch Melanie Jarnson [as antiquities expert Brooke] explain, in that voice she uses, that it's about life, death, love, power – and a few unpleasant deities."

Iseman, previously seen in *Annabelle Comes Home*, *Fear of Rain*, *Tales of Halloween*, and the *I Know What You Did Last Summer* television series, had the most up-close and personal work with the board. She agrees regarding the advantages of having the source of the fear right in front of you on set. "Any time I work," she says, "it's so nice to have something physical and tangible that helps tell the story, because the board is very much a character of its own – and especially on the days when it was just me and the board together. We got to do a bunch of fun camerawork with it; there was a rig where we had the pendulum board joined with the camera."

"She just liked being in control of the camera, that's all," Russell interjects, and Iseman laughs, "That's it, I'm a control freak! But no, it was fun, because it was kind of like I was in my own little world for those scenes, and Chuck was so great about getting us there."

"I think it's literally hypnotic," Russell adds, "the circular element of the board, the way the pendulum swings, the way we got to shoot it. There may be a little level of real hypnotism in this, so watch out!"

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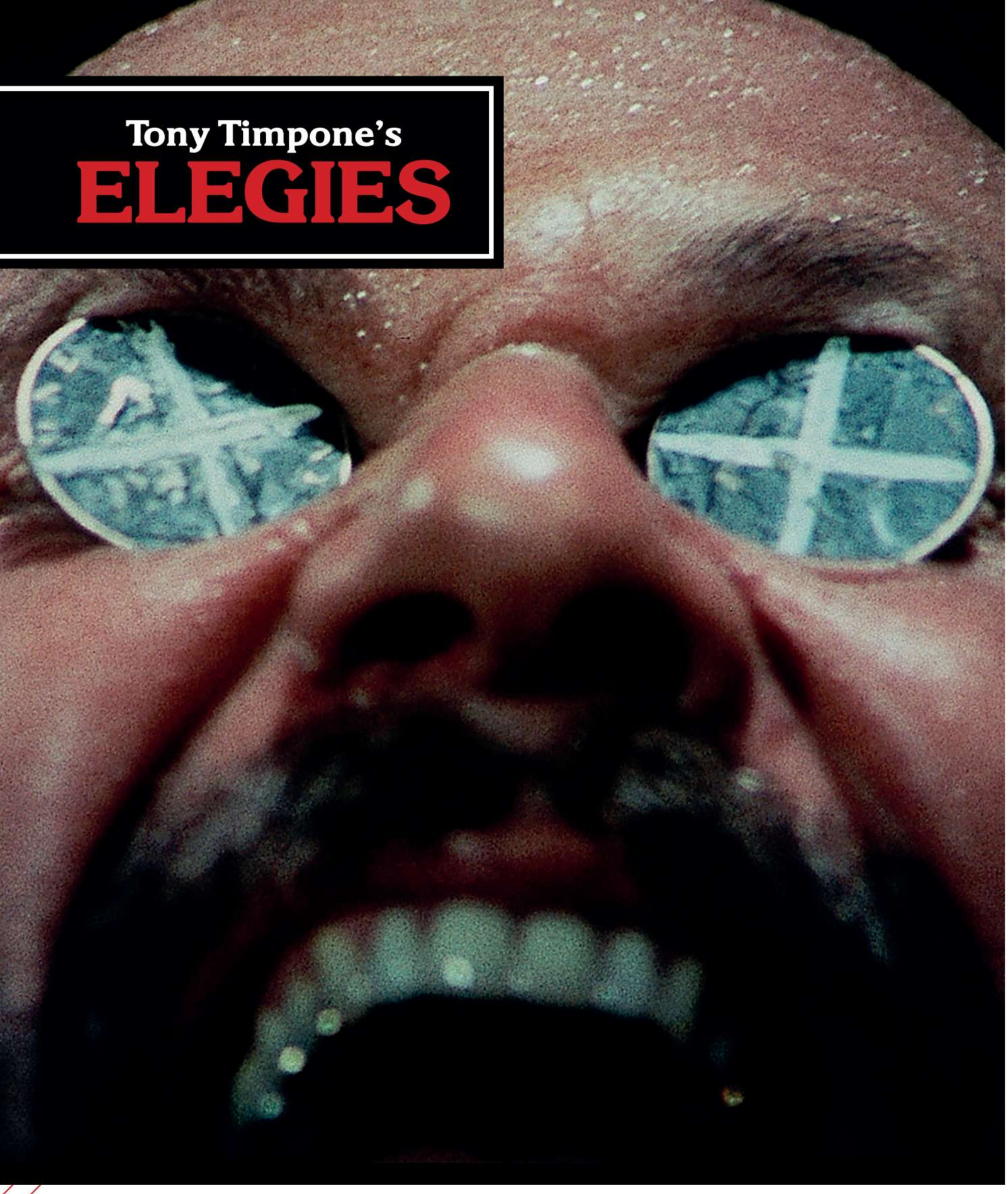


Tony Timpone's
ELEGIES

THE ENDURING LEGACY OF *WAKE IN FRIGHT*

WITH THE RECENT LOSS OF FILMMAKER TED KOTCHEFF, WE REMEMBER HIS MOST HORROR-ADJACENT FILM.

I've been fortunate to have met and befriended most of horror's major talents, from A (Argento) to Z (Zombie). One movie person whom I was very fond of on a personal level never made a scary movie. He's Ted Kotcheff, who passed away in April at age 94.

Throughout his remarkable but largely unheralded career, the Canadian-born director toiled in many genres. He tackled social comedies (*The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*); sports dramas (*North Dallas Forty*); mysteries (*Who Is Killing the Great Chefs of Europe?*) and action (*Uncommon Valor*). His biggest hits remain hallmarks of 1980s cinema: the first Rambo film *First Blood* and the black comedy *Weekend at Bernie's*. The closest he came to horror was 1971's *Wake in Fright*, a landmark Australian film almost lost in the mists of time.

With a title like *Wake in Fright* and the top-billed presence of *Halloween*'s Donald Pleasence, you might think this movie offers edge-of-your-seat terror. Not exactly…

Wake in Fright follows a vacationing schoolteacher's miserable moral decline when he loses everything during an unlucky rural stopover. There we witness the locals' incessant macho posturing and uncontrollable drinking binges, as well as a real mass kangaroo slaughter not for the squeamish. *Wake in Fright* was feared missing for decades after an abortive theatrical release; archivists finally rediscovered it in 2004. It has since been crowned one of the greatest Australian films of all time.

As a FANGORIA editor and Fantasia programmer, I not only championed *Wake in Fright*, but got to call Ted a friend. I met him in 2011 when a mutual acquaintance, Antonio Saillant, introduced us. Over dinner in Hell's Kitchen, we hatched plans for *Wake in Fright* to play the 2011 edition of Fantasia. I later submitted it to Bruce Goldstein of Manhattan's leading repertory house, Film Forum. This kicked off a major *Wake in Fright* art-house rerelease by Drafthouse Films in fall 2012.

Ted was the consummate raconteur. And during our lively get-togethers and at post-screening Q&As, he loved talking about *Wake in Fright* and considered it among his best efforts. He told me he was initially attracted to the story by the fact that the character of John Grant (played by Gary Bond) is an outsider. "[Grant] is a teacher, he hates the Outback, and he doesn't want to be there. What's terrifying about it is that our central character has no idea who he is or what he's capable of except when he's put under the extreme circumstances that he does endure, and he sees a whole dark side of himself that comes up, so there is a kind of horrific element to it."

Much of what happens in *Wake in Fright* is profoundly disturbing as we watch Grant descend into drunken madness when his life goes to hell. "Had [Grant] gone on to Sydney like he was supposed to – instead he lost all of his money and got stuck in this horrific, horrific town –" Kotcheff said, "he never would have discovered what

he was like and what he was capable of. That's what the picture's about: a man put in extreme circumstances, and suddenly, he discovers dark sides to his character that he never knew existed, and that horrifies him."

As harrowing as *Wake in Fright* is, I always wondered what Kotcheff would have done with a pure fright film. But the genre never appealed to him. "Horror films, I hate going – why would I pay money to be frightened? I don't like horror films. I don't like seeing horror films. It's one genre I would never do."

Kotcheff gave a pre-Loomis Pleasence one of his most complex roles, that of *Wake in Fright*'s don't-turn-your-back-when-he's-tipsy Doc Tydon. The director loved working with the actor.

"Oh, he was a charmer," Kotcheff recalled. "I was very lucky he was a friend of mine, but he was always charming anyway; we got along so well together. He had a wonderful, wicked sense of humor, and you could see it in his eyes all the time. And you never knew whether he was being serious or not with some of the things he was saying, which gave tremendous interest and depth to the character."

A year before *Deliverance*'s Ned Beatty pig-squealed, Doc Lydon rapes Grant (off-camera). The scene traumatized a future filmmaking legend.

"In 1971, at the Cannes Film Festival, I was sitting in as the jury was watching *Wake in Fright*," Kotcheff recalled. "And a voice behind me kept saying, 'Wow! Wow! What a scene! Phew! I love this so much! Great! It's great!'

"And then when this homosexual rape scene came up, he said, 'Oh, my God! This director's gonna go all the way! He's gone all the way! What a climax!'"

That audience member wound up being 28-year-old "American kid" Martin Scorsese. "When the film was lost and we found it, Scorsese asked for a print," Kotcheff noted. "He was in charge of the classics department in Cannes. And he remembered my film after 38 years. We gave him a print, and he declared it a Cannes Classic."

CO-WRITER/DIRECTOR TED KOTCHEFF (LEFT) WITH THE AUTHOR.

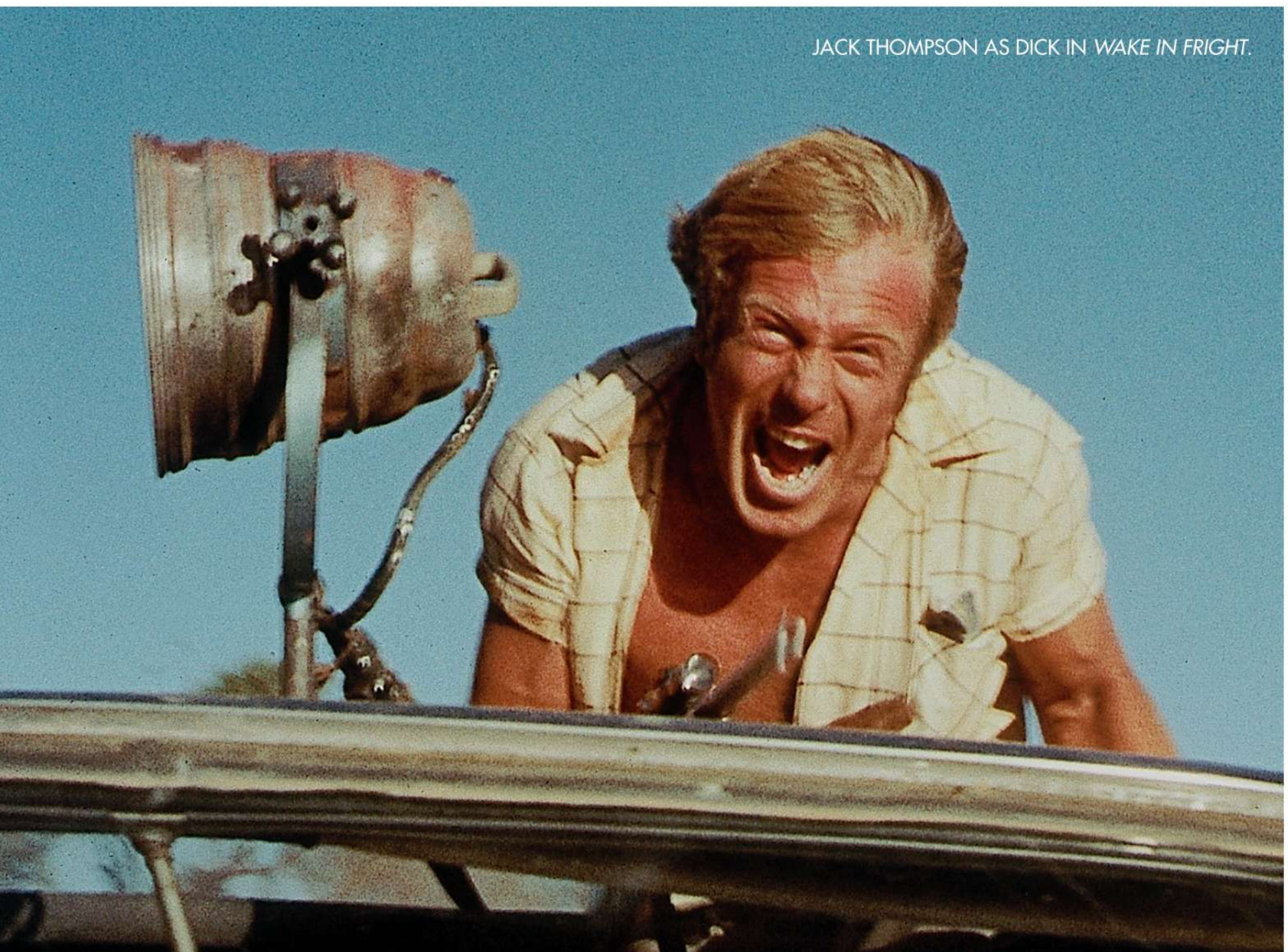
Besides *Wake in Fright*'s buggery, the movie's most controversial scene occurs during an actual nighttime kangaroo hunt. The hopping marsupials are gunned down in a shocking sequence of brutality. Though the kangaroos were slated to be killed anyway (to serve as American dog food!), Kotcheff regretted lensing the infamous animal massacre.

"If I shot [that scene] today, I'd have to find some other way, obviously, to do it," he said. "They do have other ways now that they didn't have then – animatronics and all those techniques, CGI, which didn't exist then. If I did it today, I would not photograph real killings."

Wake in Fright is once again gaining new life. Last month, Australian company (natch) Umbrella Entertainment dropped a gorgeous 4K restoration. Ted would be so pleased. "I just can't get over it, it just goes on and on – at film festivals, people think it's a great film," Ted said on the eve of the film's resurrection in 2012. "It's getting rereleased now to all over America. I made this film 40 years ago. And it's being celebrated again! It's just the most extraordinary experience for me."

You deserved it, Ted.

PHOTO (TOP RIGHT) BY KING-WEI CHU


JACK THOMPSON AS DICK IN *WAKE IN FRIGHT*.

Michael Gingold's

Exordium

Should A Woman Direct CARRIE?

On gender disparity in the genre.

It was only four issues ago that I was calling out a fellow critic in this column, something I generally like to avoid, and here I am about to do it again. But I was in the midst of hashing out this Exordium when I read something that really cheesed me off, to the point where I can't not address it. (I'll get to my main subject shortly, I promise.)

The offending words are part of a review of *Rust* written by *Variety*'s Owen Gleiberman, which inevitably begins with a discussion of the tragic on-set death of cinematographer Halyna Hutchins and wounding of director Joel Souza. Gleiberman takes the occasion to pontificate about "the small but dicey roster of films" that suffered fatalities on their sets. "Is it part of the tainted karma of this category that the films themselves end up struggling to justify their existence?" he writes. "Brendan [sic] Lee was killed by a gunshot during the filming of *The Crow* (1994), and since his character, a rock 'n' roller who is murdered and resurrected, presided over the movie like a ghost, the slipshod slovenliness of *The Crow* only seemed to heighten the senselessness of Lee's death."

Now, anyone familiar with Gleiberman's work (for *Variety* and *Entertainment Weekly*) will know that he can't exactly be trusted to properly evaluate and contextualize genre fare. This is, after all, the man who panned *Let the Right One In* (which he somehow identified as a serial-killer film), wrote an essay about how Rob Bottin's FX in *The Thing* aren't so great after all, and claimed that *Halloween* is a "knockoff" of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* because the killers in both movies wear masks. But his reference to *The Crow* here descends into the downright offensive – beyond the fact that he can't even spell Brandon Lee's name correctly.

Look, if Gleiberman doesn't like *The Crow* as a film, that's fine. But to suggest that this perceived mediocrity is what makes Lee's death so grievous – that, in effect, Lee died for nothing, or that his demise wouldn't have been so awful if the movie were better – is pretty galling. The rest of the world saw *The Crow* as an unintentionally elegiac showcase for Lee's talent, a permanent tribute to a great man whose life and career were tragically cut short. Gleiberman sees the awful circumstances of Lee's death as an excuse to aim some cheap snark at a film he doesn't care for.

OK, that's out of my system, on to the other discussion at hand, sparked by online debate surrounding Mike Flanagan's forthcoming series adaptation of Stephen King's *Carrie* for

Prime Video: Why wasn't a female director, who would be more directly sympathetic to *Carrie*'s protagonist, behind this project? Is this another case of a man taking a job that should have been filled by a woman?

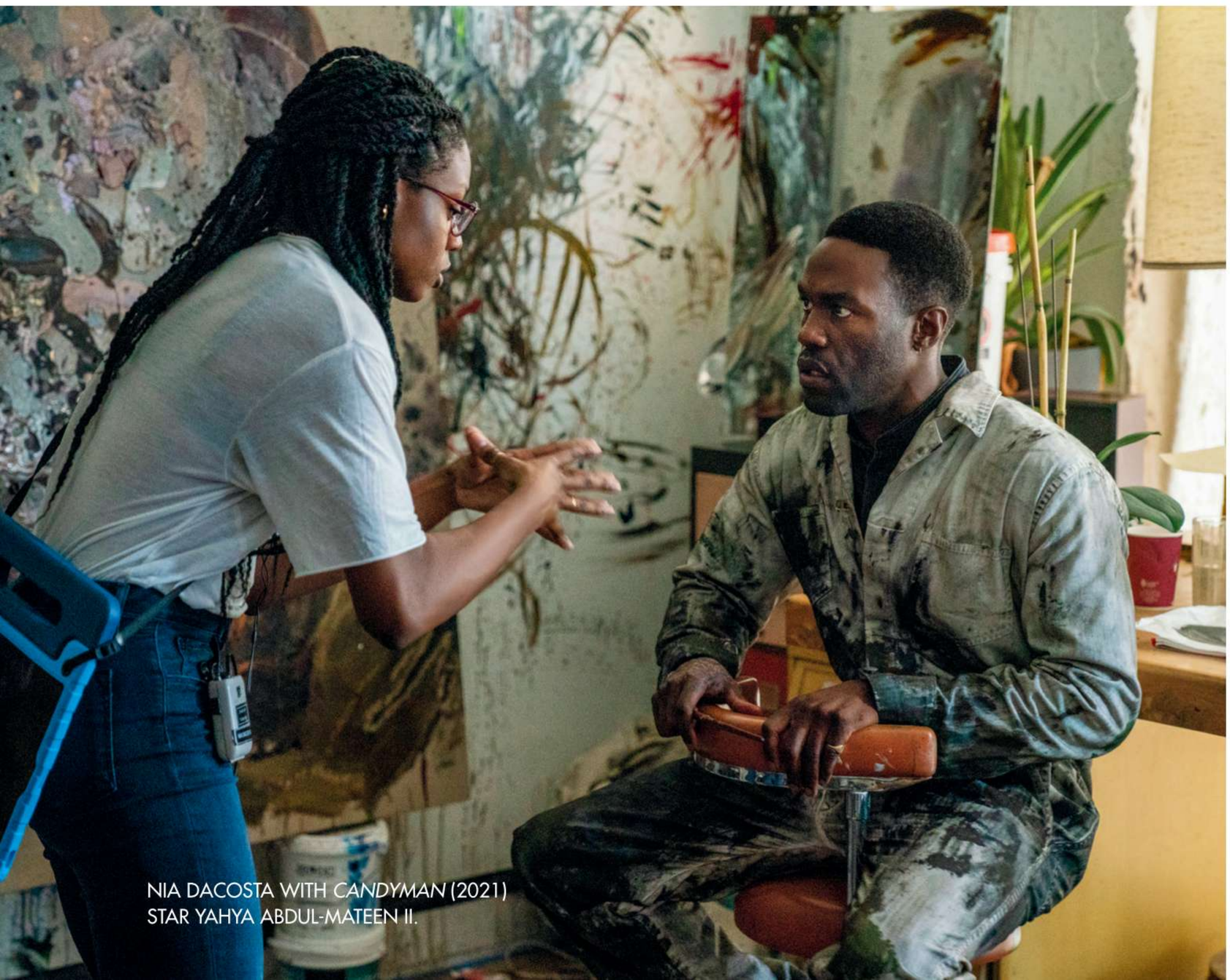
I'm of two minds about that. On one hand, I would love to see what Julia Ducournau or Coralie Fargeat or Rose Glass could do with *Carrie*. On the other, it's hard to argue that this particular iteration isn't in very good hands. Flanagan has proven himself multiple times over as a particularly skilled adapter of significant literary horror properties; most pertinently, he tackled one of King's most female-centric novels, *Gerald's Game* – a book long viewed as unfilmable – and knocked it out of the park. I have no doubt that his *Carrie* will be especially sensitive to the needs of this story and its heroine, and given the length of a series instead of a feature film to play with, he'll no doubt find many interesting ways to flesh out Carrie and her situations.

The discourse over who should helm *Carrie* also encompassed the overall state of women filmmakers in the genre, and whether they're getting the same opportunities as men. Again, I'm of two minds about this. There's no denying that the last decade has seen a renaissance of female voices in scary cinema. Since Karyn Kusama and Jennifer Kent kicked down the doors with *Jennifer's Body* and *The Babadook*, respectively, we've seen and enjoyed the works of the aforementioned Ducournau (*Raw*, *Titane*), Fargeat (*Revenge*, *The Substance*), and Glass (*Saint Maud*), along with Chloe Okuno (*Watcher*), Prano Bailey-Bond (*Censor*), Issa López (*Tigers Are Not Afraid*), Michelle Garza Cervera (*Huesera: The Bone Woman*), Hanna Bergholm (*Hatching*), and Fango's own Rebekah McKendry (*Glorious*), among numerous others. A few have been handed the keys to the franchise kingdoms: Leigh Janiak, who debuted *Honeymoon* the same year as *The Babadook*, landed the *Fear Street* film trilogy; Natalie Erika James followed up the remarkable *Relic* with the *Rosemary's Baby* prequel *Apartment 7A*; and up-and-comer Lindsey Anderson Beer made her debut with *Pet Sematary: Bloodlines*.

On the other hand, the majority of these films existed in the indie/streaming arena, with only a handful of studio/wide-release genre gigs going to women. Nia DaCosta took the helm of *Candyman*, Emma Tammi's strong work on the low-budget *The Wind* led her to *Five Nights at Freddy's* (and its upcoming sequel), Arkasha Stevenson made her mark on a classic franchise with *The First Omen*, and Halina Reijn's *Bodies Bodies Bodies* made it to nationwide play. So while the balance has been redressed somewhat over the last ten years, full parity still has yet to be achieved.

Might the honors recently bestowed upon one of the afore-mentioned filmmakers help out? Earlier this year, Fargeat became not just the tenth woman nominated for a Best Director Academy Award for *The Substance*, but only the second (after *The Power of the Dog*'s Jane Campion) to get nods for Best Picture, Director and Screenplay for the same movie. She's also the second filmmaker to nail that trifecta for a horror entry; the first was Jordan Peele for *Get Out*. And so far in 2025, some of the strongest Oscar buzz has been for Ryan Coogler's vampire smash *Sinners*. The message to the studios seems clear: If you want Oscar glory for a genre film, giving a shot to an auteur from an underrepresented group is a good bet.

CORALIE FARGEAT ON THE SET OF *THE SUBSTANCE*.



NIA DACOSTA WITH *CANDYMAN* (2021) STAR YAHYA ABDUL-MATEEN II.

PHOTOS (TOP) BY CHRISTINE TAMALET, COURTESY OF MUBI / (BOTTOM) BY PARRISH LEWIS, COURTESY OF UNIVERSAL PICTURES

SceneQueen

RE-ANIMATOR At 40 PART 3

IN HONOR OF ITS 40TH ANNIVERSARY, BARBARA SPEAKS WITH THE CAST AND CREW WHO HELPED HER MAKE STUART GORDON'S CULT CLASSIC.

BY BARBARA CRAMPTON

Here, Barbara wraps up her oral history of the making of Re-Animator. *Read Part 1 in Issue 26 and Part 2 in Issue 27!*

THIS SECURITY GUARD (GERRY BLACK, PICTURED L-R WITH JEFFREY COMBS, THE AUTHOR, AND BRUCE ABBOTT) MIGHT BE OUT OF HIS DEPTH.

***Re-Animator* was Stuart Gordon's first movie and, although he had plenty of experience directing actors and creating outlandish scenes to shock audiences (he once staged a naked presentation of *Peter Pan*), Stuart needed a highly skilled DP to help him put his story on film. Mac Ahlberg was brought in after the producing team of Brian Yuzna and Charles and Albert Band of Empire Pictures thought the dailies could look a little better and brighter. This wasn't a dark, tense movie. This was a thrilling romp through mayhem and gore. Our first cinematographer was replaced, and Mac made the picture bolder.**

CONSIDERING HOW SLIPPERY MELVIN (PETER KENT) LOOKS, HERBERT WEST (COMBS) HAS A PRETTY GOOD GRIP ON HIM.

The shooting schedule was eighteen days. But we always went into overtime, each and every day – sometimes as many as four to six hours toward the end of filming and over the Christmas holiday. We filmed each take so many times, even with all that rehearsal we had! We were having fun and always a bit tired.

Stuart continually pushed us: "More blood, more screaming, more resisting!" was a constant refrain from Stuart. He wanted buckets of blood and as much realism as possible. When an eye is pulled out of a zombie outside the hospital elevator, it was a real cow's eye. In the iconic scene where the cat comes back to life, the swinging and banging of the basement lights went a long way toward selling the reality. After the initial howl of that cat, Rufus disappears and you never see him again in that scene, but you think you do.

Stuart wanted me to be vulnerable and to show I was pure and kind in the midst of being defiled. We talked a lot about how every man in the film had a different feeling about me, and how out of control the whole situation was for me – how it changed me and Dan [Bruce Abbott] and our relationship. Underneath all the fun and gore and mania, there's a real story of heart and loss at its core.

The first cut of the film ran two hours, and Albert Band sat in with Stuart and our editor Lee Percy to get it down to a brisk ninety minutes. Richard Band did the score, but not without a bit of tinkering to get everyone to realize it wasn't a serious affair.

Richard explains, "We argued quite a bit after viewing the first rough cut. At first they wanted the score to feel really scary, but I felt that because it was so over the top, some kind of humor or quirkiness had to be exploited. I previewed my Hermann-esque score before leaving for Italy to record it with an orchestra and was pretty much left on my own. In those days there was no way to 'preview' a score like we do today, so there had to be a real trust aspect and hope for the best."

Everyone agrees that Richard knocked the score out of the park, and the music really does inform the viewer how to feel within the varying tones of the film.

Charlie Band took the movie to Cannes in 1985 to sell to territories outside of North America, where Empire Pictures was going to release it. It sold really well. The buyers' screening at Cannes was magnificent. It won a special mention even though it was a buyers' screening only. The word out of Cannes was that *Re-Animator* was a wild and provocative film.

It first premiered for audiences at the Sitges Film Fest in Barcelona and won best of the fest that year. Upon release in the US on October 18, 1985, famed journalist Pauline Kael called it "pop [Luis] Buñuel," and Roger Ebert said, "I walked out somewhat surprised and reinvigorated (if not re-animated) by a movie that had the audience emitting taxi whistles and wild goat cries."

This film has been heralded as a cult classic, a fan favorite and the seminal film of director Stuart Gordon. It's the movie Jeffrey Combs is most identified with, the one that put Empire Pictures on the map, and it was the introduction of filmmaker Brian Yuzna.

For me, it's a personal film. A movie where I learned what it was like to work closely with others, collaborate, laugh and cry and be frightened on film. I formed friendships that would last a lifetime. I meet new friends now at conventions and film fests all over the world who continually tell me how much *Re-Animator* means to them. They tell me it's funny and shocking and… *sacred* to them. Every time, it fills me up with joy to hear this. Isn't that what film is supposed to do? Bring people together in a shared experience of something that moves or excites or thrills them? Something that is remembered and shared over and over again?

I'm proud to be a part of this film, the legacy cornerstone of Stuart Gordon and this grand project that Brian Yuzna brought us all together forty years ago to make. Happy birthday, *Re-Animator* – and many more… 💀

HE'LL BE FINE, PROBABLY.

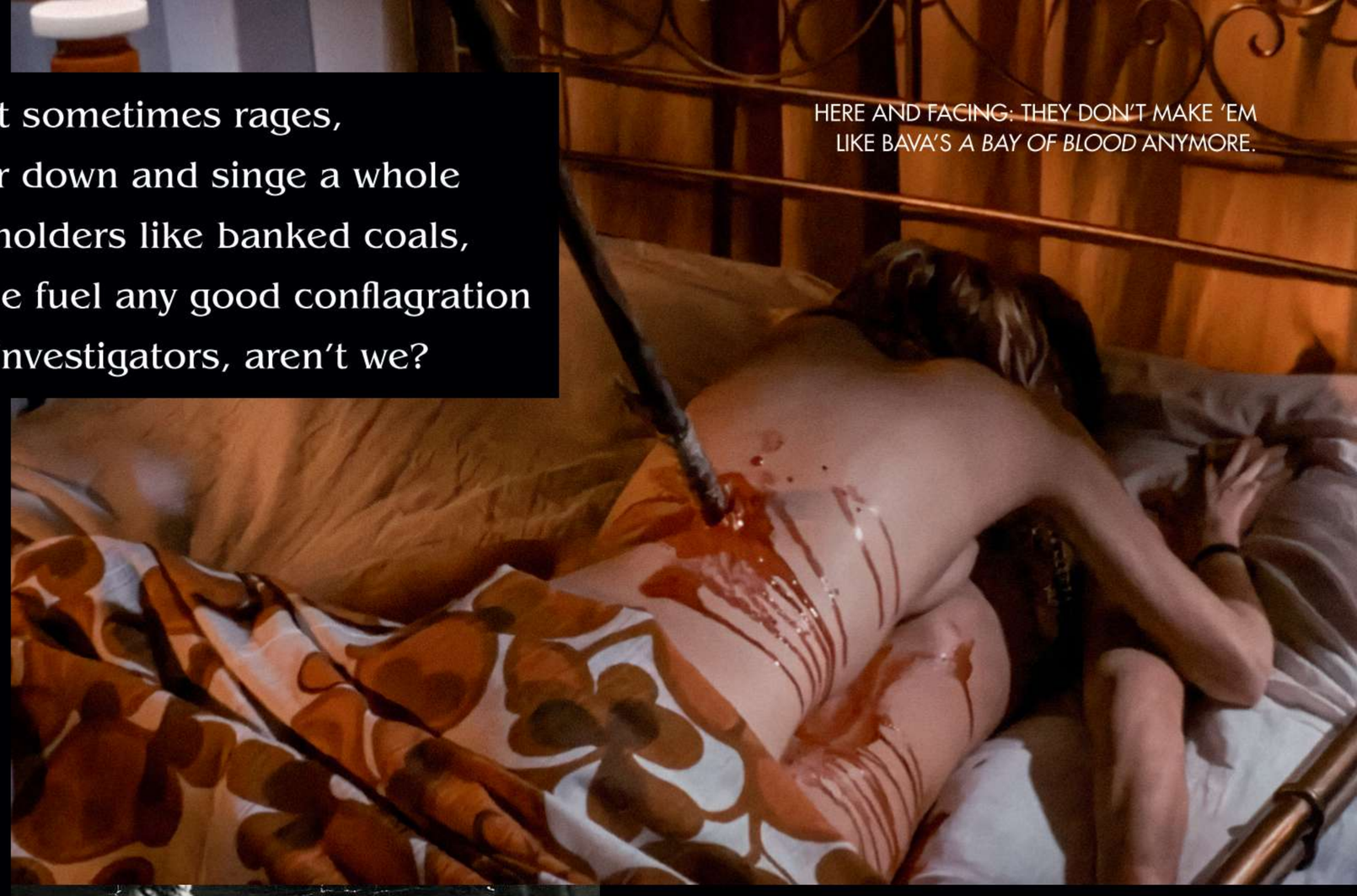
Stephen Graham Jones'

SLASHER NATION

WE DIDN'T START THE (SLASHER) FIRE

GOING BACK – WAY BACK – TO THE BEGINNING.

If the slasher genre is a fire that sometimes rages, threatening to burn the theater down and singe a whole generation, that sometimes smolders like banked coals, waiting for the next era to supply the fuel any good conflagration needs, then… then we're all arson investigators, aren't we?



HERE AND FACING: THEY DON'T MAKE 'EM LIKE BAVA'S *A BAY OF BLOOD* ANYMORE.

We're always picking through the ashes, trying to figure out when and where this whole thing started. Was it that charred VHS clamshell over there? Was that recent spate of serial killers on the news responsible? Was it global arms races percolating up through mask-wielding killers? Did all the latchkey kids left at home to fend for themselves dream their boogeymen into existence? Did a culture's imagination just get so soaked with blood, due to a televised war, that it had to leak out, had to find a Shape? What's the flashpoint? It has to have started *somewhere*, doesn't it? There has to have been a first slasher, doesn't there?

Maybe, maybe not.

Yes, *Halloween* got the genre codified in 1978, mapping out the relationship of the final girl to the masked killer and establishing so many of the necessary beats – and in clean enough fashion that they could be reduced to a formula, repeated each Friday (and each *Friday*) at the box office.

But what about *Black Christmas* four years before, right? It's got all the elements, and delivers them with a steady hand. But just before that there's *A Bay of Blood* and the whole burgeoning giallo genre – which, don't let the name fool you: it was painted Herschell Gordon Lewis *red*, actually, and was incubating killers and victims, hidden motivations and grand reveals, survivor girls and set-piece killings, all of which are great on their own, but also great when plugged into the slasher.

And of course a decade and more before that, there are the two giants getting this slasher snowball rolling through the decades, *Psycho* and *Peeping Tom*, each of them giving us that good old slashercam action, all the necessary stalking and slashing – so many of the required parts and pieces nudging each other around in the petri dish, trying to find how to lock together.

Or dial all the way back to the end of the thirties, when Agatha Christie

AND THEN THERE WERE NONE TAUGHT SLASHERS HOW IT'S DONE.

published *And Then There Were None*, a locked-room mystery that's got nearly every little part of the slasher – put a Father Death mask on the killer and the story franchises out, doesn't it? The thirties had already started out pretty slashery, too, with *Thirteen Women* and *The Thirteenth Guest* – one of which already has that Ghostface robe – and the decades before that was the heyday of the Grand Guignol theater, to which the slasher owes much of its spectacle, its bloody tableaus, and that specific thrill of being in the audience to watch these terrible (but pretty wonderful) things happening.

Fall back through the centuries for more like this, though, all the way to Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, which has all the over-the-top gore any slasher fan could ask for, or go to the playhouse next door for one of the other big revenge plays of the time, Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, where Revenge is actually personified and, like Marty in *Slaughter High*, only wants to get those scales of justice balanced again.

And why stop there.

Go all the way back to Senecan Tragedy for that good old righteous violence, where we know who deserves it, who doesn't, or head north to encounter that lovable mama's boy Grendel wading into this make-do dorm room night after night to splash drunken bodies against the wall not out of hunger, but *rage*.

And, yes, before The Pearl Poet captured *Beowulf* for us on paper, the textual record is scant, since campfires were more the delivery method for these types of stories, not text.

PSYCHO STARTED SO MANY SLASHER TRENDS WE DON'T HAVE ROOM TO LIST THEM ALL HERE.

We can imagine, though, can't we?

Let's get Paleolithic – go back to *Out of Darkness* times for that good pulpy darkness.

A party's gearing up to go on the hunt. Their grim faces cue us into how bad they need to pull a mammoth down, but the vigilant eye will notice five of these six hunters are sharing meaningful looks about what they've really got planned for the weakest of their group, once they're a sleep or two away.

Two days later, everyone's huddled around the fire and nodding off one by one. The sixth hunter, that one not as strong as the rest, is the last one to give in to sleep.

This is when the other five's eyes open.

They rise, fall on him not with their spear points but with the butts of those spears, pummeling him, *punishing* him, finally chasing him over a rocky outcropping so he can be, when they get back to camp with meat, a "victim of the hunt."

But what they're too satisfied with themselves to see is this sixth hunter clawing his way up from that ravine. He's broken and bloody, but over the next few hard seasons, he puts himself back together again, his shattered face and twisted limbs whispering about the violence done to him, the *crime* done to him, the "prank" he suffered.

And – this is important – he remembers that prank.

What's been done to him by this entitled group has been festering in him the whole while. It's what's driven him to survive.

He wants justice.

The first time he gets it, it's when one of the five hunters, drunk with the success of another hunt, steps out from the firelight to water the grass, finds this fallen hunter waiting for him with a wickedly sharp stone blade.

HERE AND ABOVE: THE PEEPED-UPON IN *PEEPING TOM*. TO THE RIGHT: THE PEEPER.

He picks the others off one by one in similar fashion, then, finally, chased by the leader of the five that did this to him, he's caught in the path of a stampede of the great beasts the camp survives on.

It has to be over now, doesn't it?

It is... until, the next day, that herd is itself driven through camp, killing more people than just that last hunter.

This is how slashers are, though. Their rage, once unbottled, turns out bottomless.

But that last hunter had this daughter, see.

After the herd's gone, she's standing there in the ruins of her home, the broken pieces of her life, and she's staring this sixth hunter down, telling him no more, that this is enough, it stops *here*, and instead of flinching away when this sixth hunter surges forward for her as well, she steps forward to meet him, and –

And this is the eternal dance, isn't it?

There have been killers seeking justice ever since the first of them was wronged by whatever entitled crew. But, when those killers step outside their purview, when, like Freddy, they go after the *children* of those who wronged them, then...

Then someone rises to stop them.

Her name is Laurie, her name is Jess, her name is Sidney, Nancy, Sam, Alice, Tree, Julie, Constance – she has so many names, but we all know what to call her: *the final girl*. And, no, there were no cameras trained on this first showdown, this first of a thousand and more slashers but, all the same, *we are* watching, aren't we? With our eyes and our hearts, with our clenched fists. Because we believe.

So, decide for yourself where and when the slasher genre gets going, but no matter what story you decide on, which masked spirit of vengeance you think gets it all started, know that long before we had the luxury of media, these unfair pranks were still being pulled, and leaving victims behind like they didn't matter.

They do, though.

And sometimes they clamber back up, are waiting for us out in the darkness, both their blade and their smile gleaming in the moonlight. 💀

SMALL SCREEN. LONG FORM. MAXIMUM TERROR: NOAH HAWLEY'S ALIEN EARTH

BY PHIL NOBILE JR.

THE **LEGION** CREATOR TAKES US INSIDE HIS NEW SERIES.

WELCOME TO EARTH: MORROW (BABOU CEESAY) AND HIS NEW FRIEND.

Give or take some *Predator* crossovers, the *Alien* film series has always been an auteur's franchise. Ridley Scott's mark on the original (as well as *Prometheus* and *Alien: Covenant*) is as distinctive as James Cameron's on *Aliens*. *Alien*^{3} was David Fincher's first feature, but it was fertile soil for both his visuals-first music video background and the nascent nihilism that would blossom in *Seven*, *Fight Club* and *Zodiac*. Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Alien: Resurrection* is, for better or worse, very much a French arthouse filmmaker's vision. For a property that could easily lapse into sameness, it's proven to be a very flexible canvas for a variety of disparate artists.

So it should come as no surprise that *Alien: Earth* creator Noah Hawley (*Fargo*, *Legion*) has every intention of continuing that tradition. Kind of.

"The *Alien* films are horror movies where 99% of the people are going to die. That's not a television series," Hawley is quick to point out. "You can't kill everybody off in the first two hours the way you would in a movie. So you have to play with form and structure."

From the looks of it, he's got a lot of material with which to do that. The press notes for *Alien: Earth* tell us the infamous Weyland-Yutani will play a larger role in the series, but alongside them are mentioned four other corporations: Prodigy, Lynch, Dynamic and Threshold. FX teases that these companies "wield the power of nations" and are in a race with one another for

proprietary technological gains in the year 2120. (Sort of like today's studio mergers and streaming wars, but with the fate of the planet hanging in the balance.) No wonder, then, that the crash landing of a mysterious vessel on Earth leads to not just the expected military action, but high-level, global corporate intrigue. Exactly how that all shakes out is something we'll have to see on FX on August 12th.

What we do know is that Sydney Chandler (*Don't Worry Darling*) will fill the protagonist's Reeboks in this outing, and she heads a compelling (and very genre-friendly) international cast, among them Alex Lawther (*Ghost Stories*), Timothy Olyphant (*Scream 2*), Essie Davis (*The Babadook*), Samuel Blenkin (*Black Mirror*), Babou Ceesay (*Rogue One*), David Rysdahl (*Booger*), and Adrian Edmondson (*The Young Ones*). Hawley points to the cast and their characters as the secret sauce of any successful *Alien* entry. "The show can't be 30 or 50 hours of running away from a monster. We need a substantial amount of 'What are we talking about and why is it interesting?' My hope is you came for the creatures, but you stayed for the characters."

How does one approach tackling and expanding one of the most beloved genre franchises in history? Hawley sought a balance between progress and fealty, but his creative process remained his own. "I did the same thing I did with *Legion* where I thought, 'Take the superpowers out of it: what's the show?' And here we said, 'Let's take the monsters out for a minute and think about what the show's about without monsters.' Certainly any long-form story, for lack of a better phrase, becomes a soap opera in which you have characters at odds with each other and undermining each other and trying to save each other. All the heroic and villainous ideas have to be brought into this world. And then if we can make a really great show, and *then* add the monsters back in, now it escalates."

It's clear that he also understands the assignment. "*Alien* has to be *Alien*. The tone of the show has to be authentic to what fans expect," Hawley says. "And that was a process for me in the editing room of getting to the right vibe for it, musically, sonically. We're in the horror genre, and so that level of dread and expectation has to run through it the whole way."

Shifting the locale from previous space-set entries to our own home planet promises to open up the possibilities of the property, and Hawley was excited to color outside the lines. "*Alien* movies tend to be trapped in a spaceship, a prison, et cetera; by definition it's always been a claustrophobic world. And so on some level, that was liberating for me because when it came time to create a world of mythology for us, there was room to play. There was certainly no canon on the order of *Star Wars*, or *Star Trek*."

At the same time, Hawley acknowledges that even the new settings need to feel authentic to the franchise. "There's a retrofuturism to the *Alien* movies that feels essential to be part of the experience; that's how you know you're watching *Alien*. But we've never really seen a terrestrial environment in the franchise. We've never really seen these creatures in an ecosystem. All those things are really interesting to me," Hawley says, adding some intriguing rhetorical questions. "When you drop an apex predator like this into an ecosystem, how does it fit in? What happens to it?"

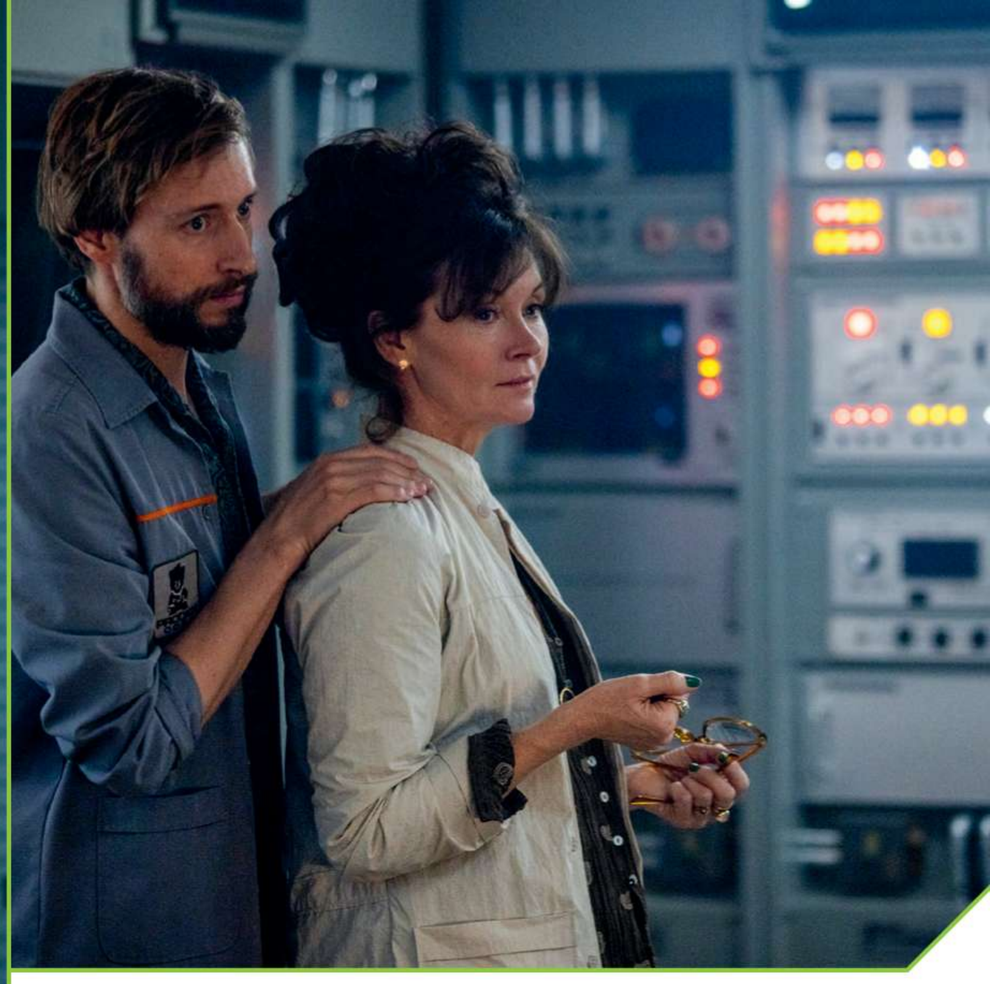
And what exactly, FANGORIA wonders, will that apex predator look like in *Alien: Earth*? "I think that we're doing some things with the creatures in this show that have not been done in an *Alien* franchise before," Hawley teases. "And I think that's what fans want at the end of the day. They're like, 'Show me something new.' Certainly we

PHOTOS BY PATRICK BROWN, COURTESY OF FX

WENDY (SYDNEY CHANDLER) CARRIES ON THE FINE FANGO TRADITION OF "CHARACTER LOOKING CONCERNED AT SOMETHING OFFSCREEN."

HERMIT (ALEX LAWTHER), SIBERIAN (DIÊM CAMILLE), AND RASHIDI (MOE BAR-EL) ALSO CARRY ON THE "LOOKING CONCERNED" TRADITION. GLAD WE'RE ALL ON THE SAME PAGE.

KIRSH (TIMOTHY OLYPHANT, LEFT) AND ARTHUR & DAME SYLVIA (DAVID RYSDAHL AND ESSIE DAVIS, RIGHT) GET IN ON THE CONCERNED FACE FUN.



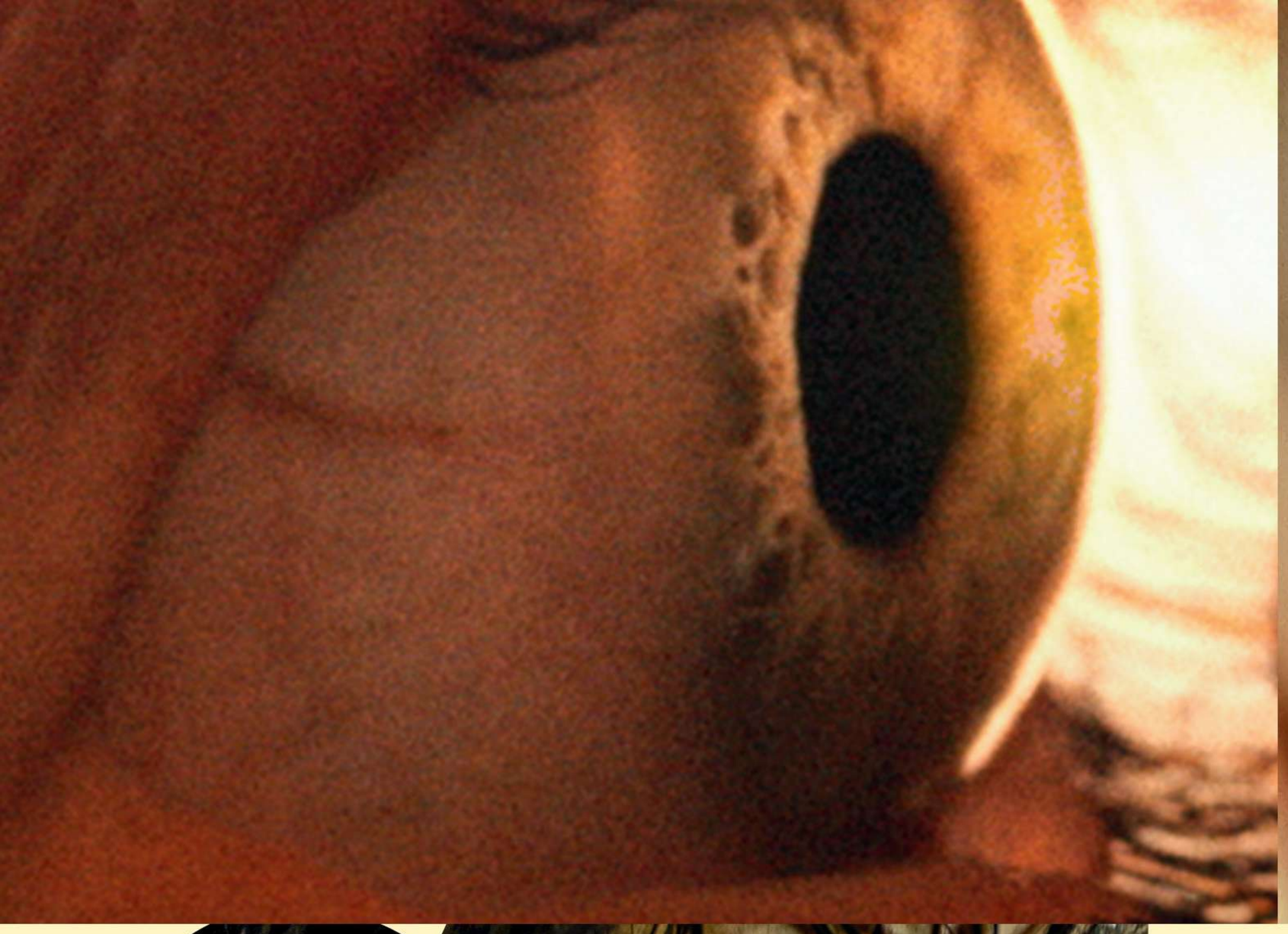
> "WE'RE DOING SOME THINGS WITH THE CREATURES IN THIS SHOW THAT HAVE NOT BEEN DONE IN AN *ALIEN* FRANCHISE BEFORE."
>
> - NOAH HAWLEY

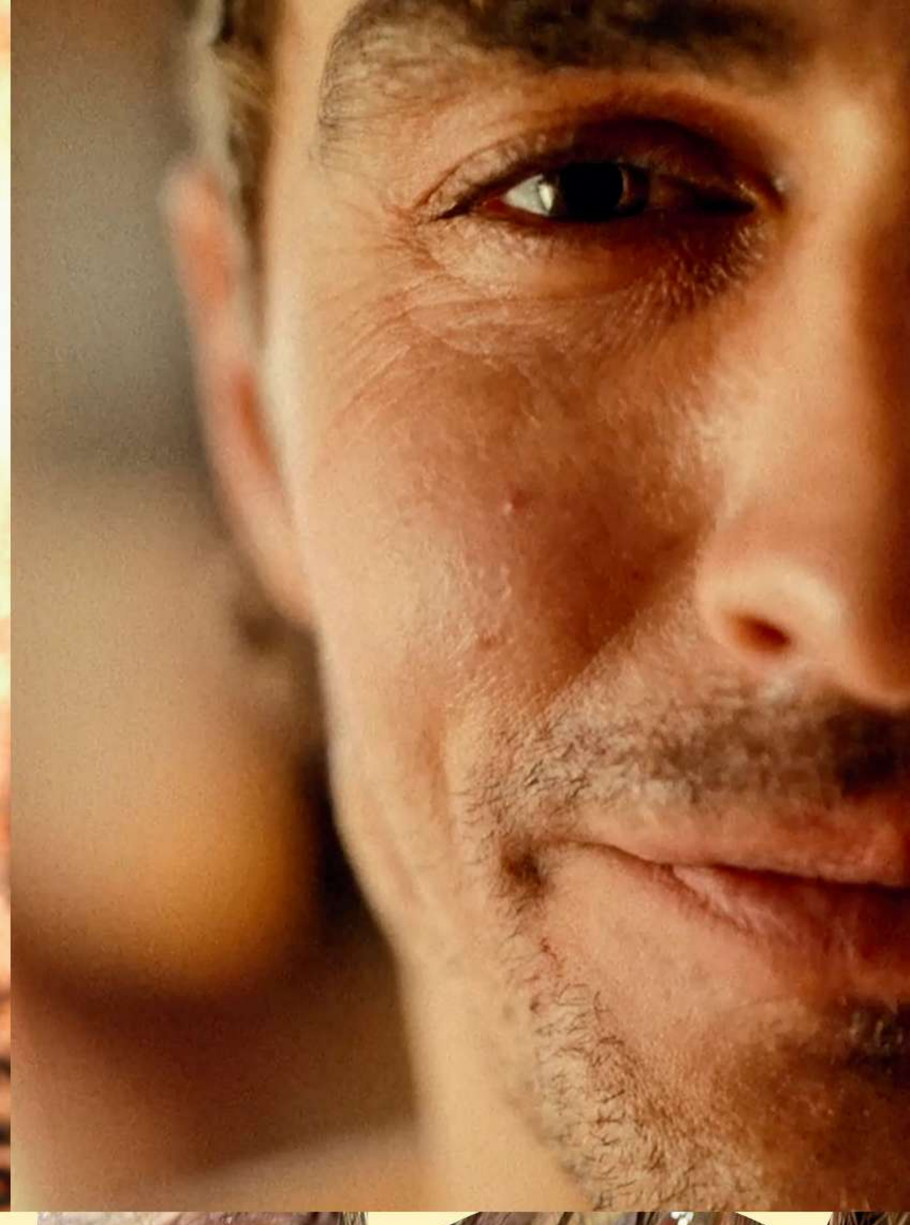
CREATOR NOAH HAWLEY (LEFT) AND FIRST A.D./CO-PRODUCER CORY FAULKNER ARE ALSO CONCERNED… THAT THE WORLD OF *ALIEN: EARTH* FEELS ACCURATE TO THE FRANCHISE.

all love the iconic moments, but it's as much about 'Hey, surprise me,' and I think that we will do that." The other half of the show's title promises to be equally compelling in this regard, as Hawley notes. "Where is the Earth a hundred years in the future? It's going to be hotter, it's going to be wetter, and we're going to have more limited resources."

Asked whether any specifics of the franchise provided inspiration, Hawley is quick to respond. "For me, it comes down to a couple of moments from the first two films. One of them is the moment in *Aliens* with Sigourney Weaver and Paul Reiser where she says, 'I don't know which species is worse. At least they don't fuck each other over for a percentage.' The real monster is humanity in these movies. And then the other moment is the Ian Holm reveal in the first film that he's an android, and the fact that you can't even trust people to be human or humane. And the idea that humanity is trapped between the AI future and the monsters in our past, I found really interesting."

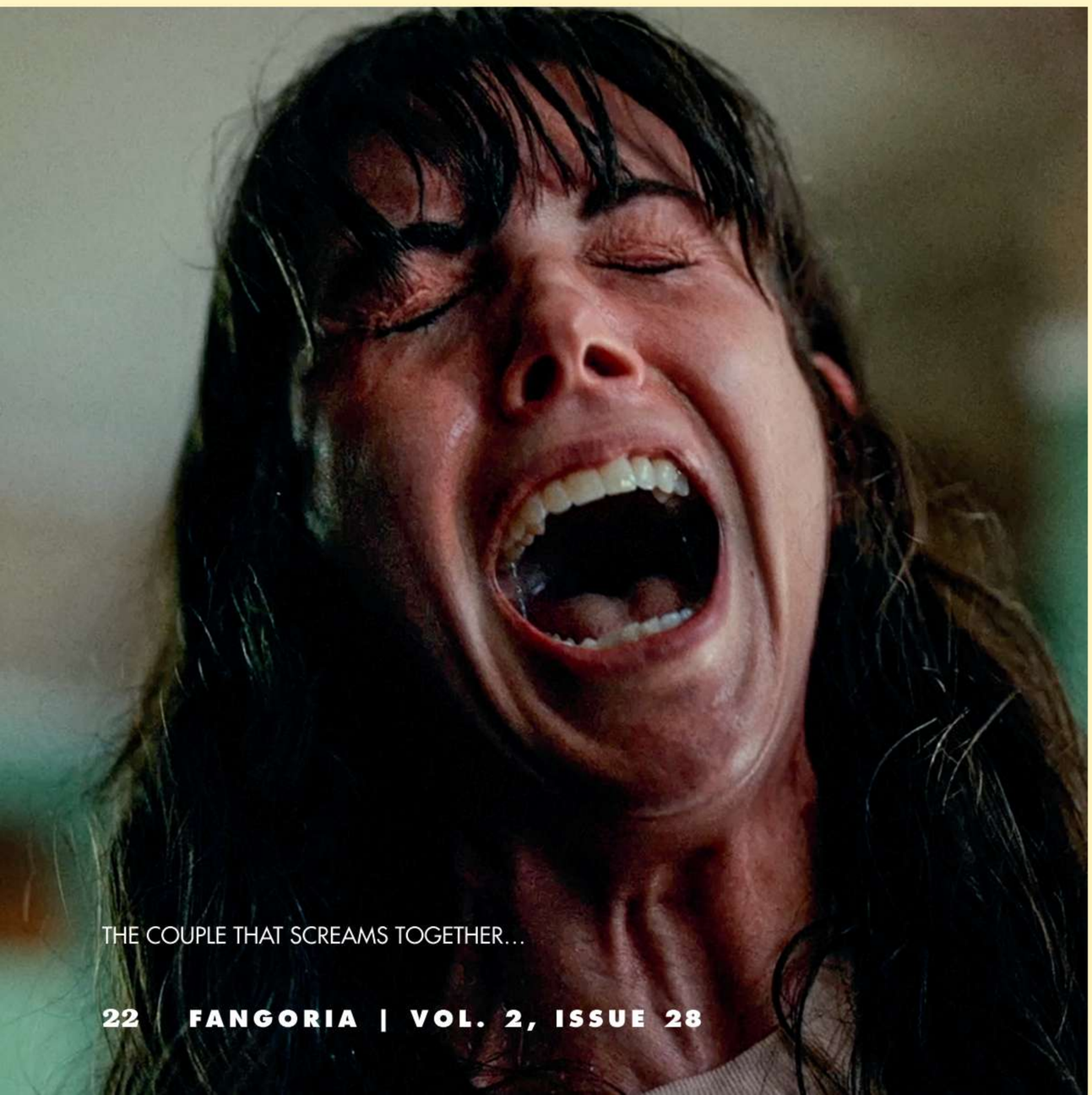
Pressed for more details, Hawley is evasive, but drops something tantalizing. "I think what was so great about that first film is you really didn't know who the star of that movie was until the end," he says. "I would joke with the actors. They'd say, 'The show is called *Alien*; we're all going to die eventually, right?' But I think the *Alien* movies revolve around the question of who's going to live and why. And usually the person who survives shows some sort of moral high ground. They survive for a reason. But as you've seen in *Fargo*, I don't always think that justice is served, and that's a feeling that we also need to learn to live with. And in this show, we expand that not to just 'will one person survive?' but 'Will any of us survive, and should we?'" 💀





STICK

BY ISAAC FELDBERG



THE COUPLE THAT SCREAMS TOGETHER...

When you've been with someone for over a decade, you can start to think you know them inside and out. But for Alison Brie and Dave Franco, making *Together* was still a bonding experience unlike any other – not least because their characters spend the film struggling against a strange condition that causes their separate flesh, however inexplicably, to start fusing.

The married couple has collaborated on films before, but their lead roles in the upcoming horror-comedy, from debut feature filmmaker Michael Shanks, brought them together in new ways, requiring a level of physical and emotional proximity that might have intimidated actors less intimately familiar with one another's work.

"Not only were we wearing prosthetics for several hours, but they were prosthetics that were connecting our bodies," recalls Brie. "Every day, we'd go home saying that we didn't know how you could make this movie with two people who are not a couple in real life."

In *Together*, Brie and Franco play Millie and Tim, who've only recently moved from the city to the countryside but already feel themselves growing

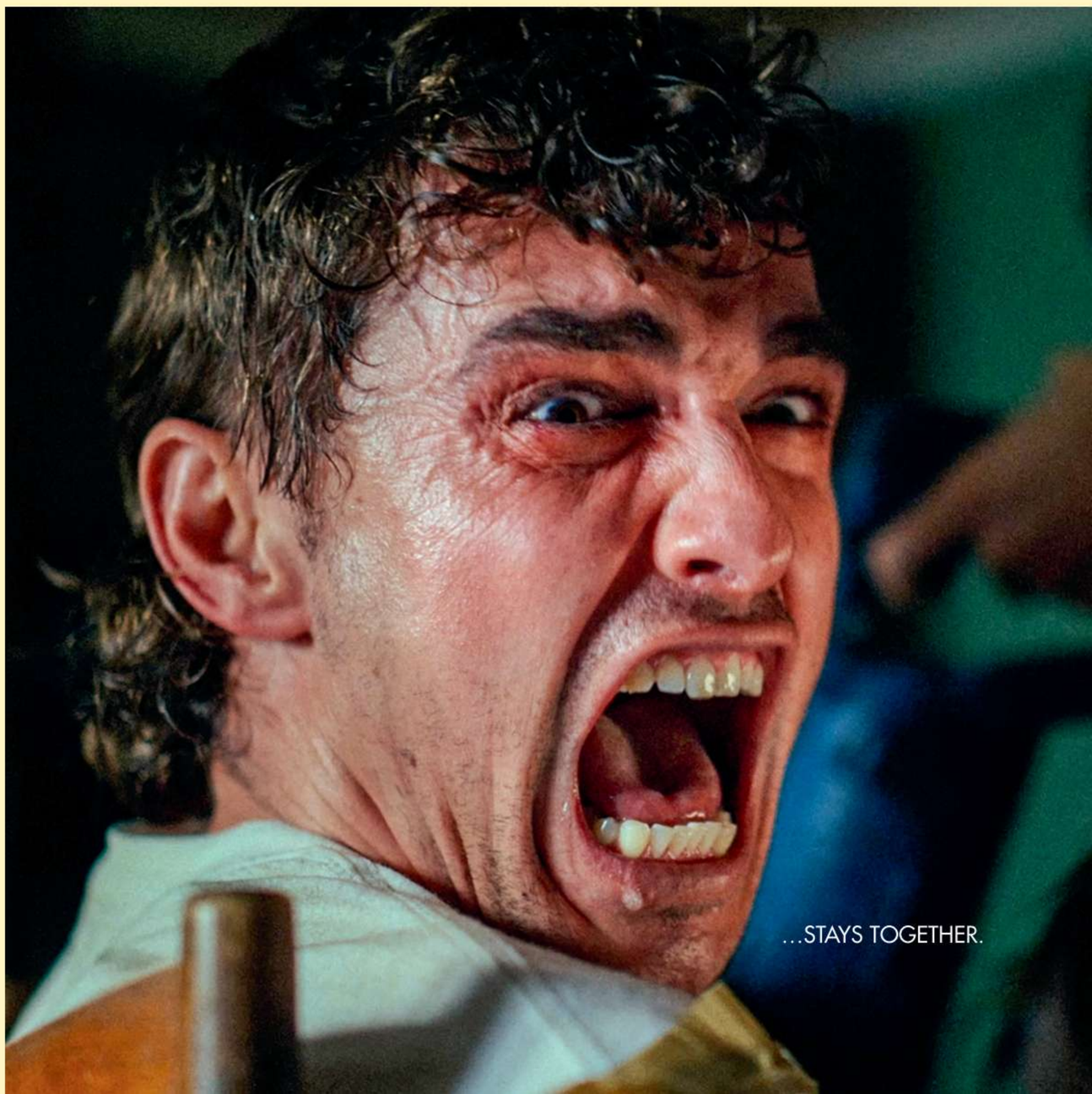
ON YOU

Alison Brie and Dave Franco get closer than ever before in the grisly body-horror comedy TOGETHER.

apart. Millie's new job as a schoolteacher is the start of a new chapter, but Tim – still clinging to dreams of rock stardom – isn't sure he's ready to turn the page. When hiking in the woods behind their new property, they're exposed to an unknown substance and soon suspect they've fallen ill. At first, their symptoms are manageable: They find that their legs have become stuck together, as if glued, and it's painful, but possible, to separate.

Later, though, when Millie begins to drive away from the house, Tim's body starts to seize in the shower, as if desperate to close the distance between them. "There was nowhere to hide," says Franco of that scene, one of the most intense he's ever filmed. "I was fully unconscious, naked, flinging my body against porcelain walls."

And that's only a taste of what awaits the couple as their codependency worsens. From a grisly moment involving an electric saw, to an uncomfortably sticky quickie in a bathroom stall, and a sequence in which the couple struggles from opposite ends of a hallway as



something in their flesh drags them toward each other, *Together* subjects its characters to one bone-crunching, skin-crawling ordeal after another.

Both actors call *Together* the most physically demanding shoot they've worked on. "By the end of the shoot, my body was hammered," Franco says proudly. "We have a full collage of all my cuts and bruises throughout." Of course, he couldn't see all of them himself: "I would get out of the shower and be like, 'Ooh, my ass hurts.'"

Brie laughs: "I'd be like, 'Baby, you have a *huge bruise* on your butt cheek.' Then I'd get the camera."

Brie, meanwhile, had to try slamming her head against a glass window at least once and was rewarded with a little bruise on her nose for the rest of the shoot. Though they're in awe of the stunt professionals on set, both actors felt certain sequences benefitted from the realism of their own bodies contorting and convulsing on screen.

"We put ourselves through so much physically, because the monster in the movie is inside of our bodies," remarks Brie. "There's a constant push and pull that you're playing, which is physically a very unique way of working. Also, the scenes are all heightened emotionally, we're in very close quarters, and there are physical demands and exhaustion associated with certain prosthetics."

After a beat, she concludes: "It's the most fun we've ever had on set."

The duo's commitment was a boon for Shanks, who only had 21 days to shoot his feature debut. "Every single day, there was something horrible that they had to do physically," he recalls. "Every day that we'd have a scene of dialogue around the dinner table, we'd finish that scene and say, 'Okay, four o'clock, bring in the puppets and prosthetics, and let's make Dave throw himself around the room.'"

Brie and Franco had been approached on multiple occasions about playing domestic partners, but they held off until *Together* presented them with the chance to portray a couple whose relationship had reached a stage, in terms of depth and duration, that they felt reflected their shared experience.

"We figured our inherent comfortability with each other, and our history with each other, would hopefully bleed through onto the screen," says Franco. "And that was very important, because our characters are at odds pretty much throughout this entire film, but you still need to feel the undercurrent of love between them."

Of course, Brie adds, "I like to think of our relationship as healthy codependency, and what we're exploring in the movie is more toxic codependency."

The underlying concept of a couple reaching a crossroads, though, was thought-provoking for them both, and they went into the project aware that it would either end in divorce or leave them closer than ever. "If Dave and I didn't have such a strong relationship," says Brie, "this might have been a dangerous project to take on."

Instead, they found it freeing to confront on screen the kinds of fears they've overcome in their own relationship. "The movie is about the fear of losing your identity in a relationship, on one end or the other," Brie adds. "One person is afraid of losing themselves if they go too deep into the relationship; the other person is afraid of losing themselves if they leave the relationship."

For Shanks, the film came from a very personal place: sixteen years into a relationship, he and his partner realized that neither of them could remember what life had been like before the other. "You reach a point in a relationship where you start to wonder where you end and that partner begins," he says. "What got my wheels turning was thinking about how to take that idea to a visceral, physical extreme."

Together delivers on intensely revolting body horror, but what makes Shanks' approach satisfying is the way those setpieces, in brutally literal fashion, reflect the concepts of love and codependency at its heart. "Every setpiece furthered the story," says Brie. "Nothing felt arbitrary or just for gross-out effect. It was about each step leveling up this couple getting closer and closer – and not just getting closer, but having more and more trouble separating."

Certain scenes in *Together* put a body-horror twist on terms intimately familiar to anybody who's been in love: mind-meld, lip-lock, hand-hold, eye contact, attached at the hip, the pull-out method. "A film with this premise, you can only make it once, so I was keen to squeeze every drop of juice from it, because you can never do it again," Shanks explains. "I get frustrated when I see horror films that don't deliver on the promise of the genre; when writing this script, every ten pages, I wanted something *nuts* to happen."

REAL-LIFE COUPLE ALISON BRIE AND DAVE FRANCO WERE WAITING FOR JUST THE RIGHT FILM TO PLAY A COUPLE ONSCREEN. *TOGETHER* PASSED MUSTER.

Shanks has long been obsessed with body horror; he leapt at the opportunity to pull off an homage to John Carpenter's *The Thing* – specifically its kennel sequence, distinguished by the dog-thing that emerges as a gory, slime-slicked mass of blood, flesh, and tentacles – early in his film. Though he names *The Fly* as one of his favorite films ever, Shanks also cites Brian Yuzna's *Society* and Stuart Gordon's *Re-Animator* as influences on *Together*.

Still, Shanks thinks *Together* brings realism to what's often an exaggerated, ironic genre. "We're celebrating body-horror films that have come before but trying to make it live in a more realistic, grounded way," he says. "I told our department heads: body horror is often quite gooey and slurpy, but I wanted this to feel drier and cracklier, to make it feel more painful and more grounded in the relative realism of our world."

Brie remembers "watching horror constantly" in high school, though she took a step back after leaving home and living alone, only for Franco to reintroduce her to the genre after they started dating. "I would love to watch a horror movie every night," Franco explains, recounting, "We went through a phase where I would essentially vet horror movies for her, and I would tell her if a movie was good enough that it was worth her being scared for the following week."

During the pandemic, the couple made their way through the films of David Cronenberg, like romantic tragedy *The Fly*, where a man unintentionally fuses with a fly on a molecular level, and flesh-and-metal psychodrama *Crash*, about car-crash fetishists. Though populated by pulsating orifices and infernal devices, Cronenberg's films involve collisions of existential ideas – around aging, death, mortality, and desire – most of all.

"In terms of his films surpassing body horror, there are always deep themes that are being explored," Brie says. "The goop and gore is just a means to extrapolate those themes to their craziest conclusions. There's a lot of romance, a lot of social commentary, and a lot of sexiness."

With *Together*, "We're definitely trying to adopt that mentality," says Franco. "We wanted there to obviously be moments of gruesome, nasty setpieces but, at the same time, we wanted this movie to be able to stand on its own as a compelling relationship drama."

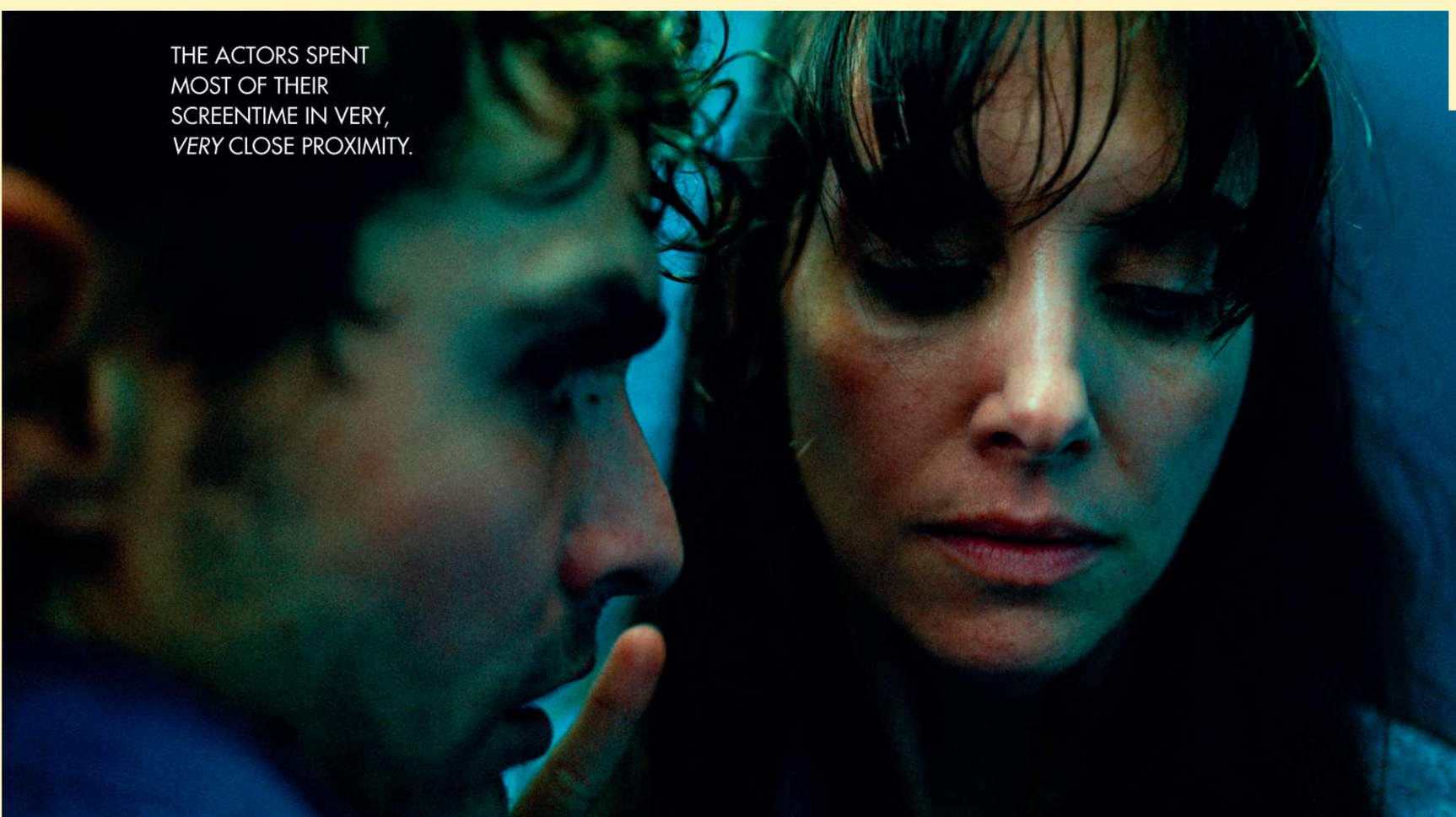
As such, he and Brie intentionally focused on the emotional reality of their characters' peculiar predicament, "knowing that the situations we found ourselves in were so extreme and insane that, the more grounded we played it, the funnier it would be," he says.

This was certainly true for Shanks and others on set during another standout sequence – involving too much hair and a puppet cast of Franco's head, designed by the legendary prosthetics designer Larry Van Duynhoven (which the filmmaker has since mounted on his wall) – that left Franco "actually dry-retching."

For Brie, this scene was a moment that deeply affirmed her faith in *Together*. "It's near and dear to all of us," she recalls, "because it had almost been cut from the film for budgetary reasons, but Shanks really fought to keep it in the film. He had a strong vision and storyboards for it, and the night we shot it, everybody was like, 'You were right. This is so cool, so freaky, so visceral.' And that's what body horror is: visceral translations of emotions we're feeling."

Shanks, on the other hand, "couldn't stop cackling," he recalls. "I was like, 'I can't believe somebody's giving me money to shoot this. This is *ridiculous*." 💀

PHOTOS COURTESY OF NEON



BY AMBER T.

THEY'RE NOT ZOMBIES

(BUT THEY'RE STILL SCARY)

28 YEARS LATER

SMUFX CREATIVE SUPERVISOR JOHN NOLAN DISCUSSES THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE INFECTED OF THIS FILM, AND THE UNDEAD THAT SPAWNED THEM TWENTY-EIGHT YEARS AGO.

Like most of the world, Britain is angry. Between years of austerity, a Brexit that has continually failed to deliver on any of its promises (those of us who voted against it could've told you that, but I digress), an ever-inflating cost of living crisis, six Prime Ministers in the last 15 years and continued attacks on our most vulnerable populations from people whose threshold of cruelty is only equaled by the expanse of their bank account, this is a nation pissed off by more than just our bad weather. A national ennui has sharpened to blood-red fury, and it's been left unchecked to fester under the surface of this green and pleasant land. No better time, then, to have two of Britain's greatest living filmmakers resurrect one of the country's most influential and terrifying horror franchises, one that centers on an isolated island ravaged by a deadly rage virus that turns normal, decent people into furious, frothing beasts. If anything, the analogy is a little *too* on the nose, but if anyone can craft our situation into cinematic catharsis, it's Danny Boyle and Alex Garland.

Over two decades on from the pair's game-changing *28 Days Later*, Boyle and Garland return as director and co-writer, respectively, for another chapter of the post-apocalyptic nightmare they first crafted back in 2002. This time around, Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Jodie Comer, Jack O'Connell and Ralph Fiennes lead the cast as part of a pack of survivors who've established a nascent society on the Holy Island of Lindisfarne, Northumbria. While what's left of humanity has struggled to find its feet, over on the ominous mainland, the threat has only evolved.

With years gone by since the onslaught of *28 Days Later*'s slathering, rage-infected hordes invaded our nightmares, how does a creative team keep their creatures looking fresh when the source material has arguably influenced every zombie/infected design that followed, from *REC* to *The Walking Dead*? For special makeup effects creative supervisor John Nolan (whose credits include work on the equally dystopian *Children of Men* and *Jurassic World: Dominion*), along with concept artist David Darby and production and costume designers Gareth Pugh and Carson McColl, their instructions were relatively simple. Boyle was happy to let the crew loose on designs, asking only that they keep in mind Jeff Goldblum's infamous *Jurassic Park* declaration: life finds a way.

"They're not zombies," Nolan asserts, speaking with us from the set of his latest mystery project. "That's the thing. We had to make sure that people understand that they're infected, not dead. It was really important that people understood that it was still exactly the same infection [as in *28 Days Later*], but that the Infected have found a way to survive."

With this in mind, Nolan outlines a whole spectrum of Infected that has evolved in the years since their first cinematic outing, where those carrying the virus were still somewhat recognizable as human. The hierarchy now ranges from bestial alpha apex predators known as Berserkers (one of whom is played by 6'9 MMA fighter Chi Lewis-Parry) to the bottom-feeding Slow Lows, whose large size means they're forced to crawl sluglike along the ground, feeding on scraps left behind by those higher up in the food chain. As such, their bellies are sodden from contact with the wet earth, while their backs are blistered and burned from constant sun exposure. Creating these Slow Lows was a "dream" from a prosthetic point of view – Nolan describes the fleshy wet body as being akin to someone

"WE WERE ABSOLUTELY KNACKERED BY THE TIME WE'D FINISHED, BUT WE DIDN'T CARE BECAUSE WE KNEW WE HAD CREATED SOMETHING SO SPECIAL."

- SMUFX CREATIVE SUPERVISOR JOHN NOLAN

PHOTOS BY MIYA MIZUNO, COURTESY OF SONY PICTURES

IT AIN'T SHAKESPEARE, BUT YOU CAN SEE IT FROM HERE: BERSERKER (CHI LEWIS-PARRY): 1, GUY WHOSE HEAD THAT WAS: 0.

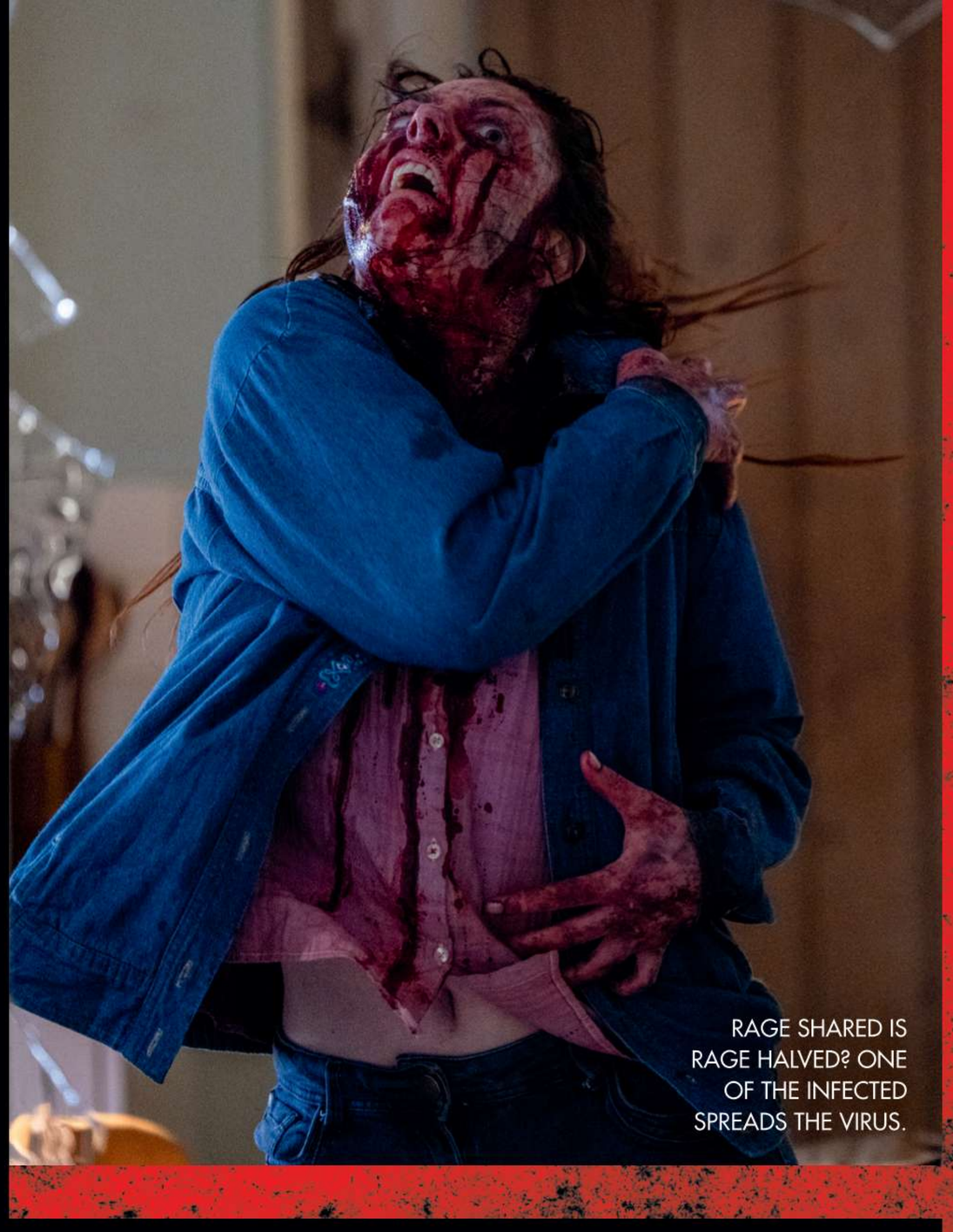
natural world continues to turn with or without humanity. One of these moments involves a fully animatronic stag. "We were filming in Newcastle, in the freezing cold," he remembers. "Danny can see the breath coming from all of the crew, from the Infected and the Berserker in the shot, but there's no breath coming out of the animal." Adding a puff of warm breath would be an easy fix in post-production, surely, but not for Boyle: "Danny went that one step further and said, 'Can we get some breath coming out of it? Because it's cold.' I said, 'Give us 10 minutes.' We got a rubber tube, shoved it up the backside of the deer and out the mouth, and we got one of the sparks [on-set electrician] with his vape. Off camera, he was blowing the vapor through the tube," Nolan laughs. "I think that's the only good use of a vape, I'd say."

While *28 Years Later* introduces a plethora of new body horror nightmares, it was also important to retain aspects of the Infected's signature look to remind audiences that they are still, at heart, the same creatures that terrorized Britain all those years ago. Nolan's team worked closely with hair and makeup designer Flora Moody, sharing meetings with Boyle to develop the contact lenses that would be used to portray a key symptom of the rage virus: those seething, rabid red eyes.

It was Moody's team that also brought to life the so-called Emaciated Infected, whose stiff and eerie movement in a field of flowers has already cemented him as the face of the new franchise. Despite Internet-wide rumors that this moment hinted at the fate of Jim, Cillian Murphy's everyman protagonist from *28 Days Later*, this particular undead is actually not Murphy, but model and art dealer Angus Neill, whose striking frame needed no extra prosthetics. Fear not though, Murphy fans: while Jim might not be appearing in *28 Years Later* (in front of the camera, at least – the Oscar-winner worked behind the scenes as executive producer), our favorite bicycle courier will be along for the ride in the second movie.

At the time of writing, not a great deal is known about the next two entries into Boyle's new trilogy. Due for release on January 16, 2026, the second entry, *28 Years Later: The Bone Temple*, was shot back-to-back with its predecessor, with *Candyman*'s Nia DaCosta taking the directorial reins from Boyle before he returns for the third, as-of-now untitled installment. Nolan, who also worked on *The Bone Temple*, isn't allowed to give too much away about the post-apocalyptic sequel, but does have faith that fans of the franchise won't be disappointed:

> "[DaCosta] is absolutely amazing. There's a continuation of weird and disgusting and creepy, beautiful stuff that we had to make for the film. I think the fans are going to love it. It's going to blow their minds." 💀



RAGE SHARED IS RAGE HALVED? ONE OF THE INFECTED SPREADS THE VIRUS.

MARK IT! A SLOW LOW PULLS DOUBLE DUTY WITH THE PRODUCTION SLATE.

ABOMINABLE AND FOUND IT

FILMMAKING COLLECTIVE DIRTY SHOT CLEAN UNVEIL THEIR NEW HORROR MOCKUMENTARY *FOUND FOOTAGE: THE MAKING OF THE PATTERSON PROJECT*.

BY BRETT GALLMAN

There's no shortage of films celebrating the magic of filmmaking, that alchemic process that imprints an artistic vision onto celluloid, where it becomes a dream shared by an audience entranced by the power of cinema. However, most filmmakers – especially independent filmmakers – will tell you this process often feels more cursed than it does magical, and the alchemy is actually a blend of compromise, happy accidents, and the pure grit it takes to survive a shoot.

Upstart collective Dirty Shot Clean decided the world also needs a movie tackling this less glamorous side of the industry, so they hatched *Found Footage: The Making of the Patterson Project*, a riotous mockumentary chronicling the doomed production of a horror movie gone awry.

After finding success on the festival circuit with a series of short films, ambitious writer/director Chase (Brennan Keel Cook) is ready to move into feature filmmaking. For his debut, he's decided to helm a found footage horror riff on the story behind

CHASE (BRENNAN KEEL COOK) IS ABOUT TO FIND THE HORROR IN LOW-BUDGET HORROR FILMMAKING.

HOW MANY FILMMAKERS, HOAXERS, AND CRYPTOZOOLOGY HOBBYISTS DOES IT TAKE TO CHECK THE PULSE OF AN UNRESPONSIVE BIGFOOT (NATE DE LORIMIER)? HOW ABOUT EIGHT? (L-R: RACHEL ALIG, J.R. GOMEZ, ALINA BURGOS, ERIKA VETTER, CHEN TANG, BRENNAN KEEL COOK, AND DEL ALAN MURPHY.)

the infamous Patterson Bigfoot film. Armed with financing from a local furniture dealer (Dean Cameron) and an elderly Alan Rickman enthusiast (Suzanne Ford) expecting her favorite actor to headline the film, Chase and his modest crew head out into the woods, where a comedy of errors swiftly unfolds in the form of production difficulties, errant gunshots, and a pair of mysterious interlopers whose presence suggests this shoot is going to hell in more ways than one.

Walking the horror-comedy tightrope is a familiar yet tricky proposition, but the Dirty Shot Clean trio – writer/director Max Tzannes, writer/composer David San Miguel, and cinematographer/editor Jacob Souza – take the novel approach of having the terror slowly creep into an otherwise lighthearted affair. Inspired by the films of Christopher Guest, *Found Footage* is foremost a satirical peek into the wild world of independent filmmaking. "*This Is Spinal Tap* was a huge influence," Tzannes says. "It's like the scene where the band gets lost on the way to the stage, only here they come upon a demon along the way." Murphy's Law proceeds to operate without mercy, a notion the trio is all too familiar with.

"This movie, totally candidly speaking, is about the experience of making our own films," Tzannes reveals. "Sometimes you can feel like a demon is torturing your set." For Chase and his crew, these demons are mostly metaphorical at first, manifesting in absurd snafus: an actor with no experience wielding a camera despite signing on for a found footage movie, a miscommunication regarding the lead actor's identity, producing no usable footage for days on end.

While the particulars are heightened for comedic effect, Tzannes insists they stem from a "kernel of truth" as the trio leaned on past experiences for material. "Almost everything in the movie was something we believed could have happened," he asserts. "If you've had one stranger-than-fiction moment while making a movie, then why wouldn't a financier think Alan Rickman's still alive?" San Miguel chimes in here, noting that part of the joy of *Found Footage* is this crew's determination in the face of their doomed production, because that's the true magic of filmmaking. "The movie's mostly a comedy because it's just fun," he offers. "You make the best of a terrible situation – you flip it into something really funny by poking at it." Tzannes agrees and sees Chase's ragtag outfit as emblematic of the indie spirit: "I get most teary-eyed at people trying really hard, knowing very well they're probably going to fail and still getting up every morning and trying to do it."

However, the film also finds a subtle terror in this thwarted determination, landing it in the ranks of recent cringe horror efforts like *Creep*, *Superhost*, and *I Blame Society*. Like these films, *Found Footage* disarms and unnerves

ALAN (CHRISTIAN T. CHAN) NEEDS A BREAK.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHAD VILLELLA

its audience by inspiring secondhand embarrassment for its sincere but often oblivious characters. Tzannes asserts that the comedy and horror streams naturally cross here as viewers laugh out of sheer discomfort. "It's situational comedy, but sometimes the most uncomfortable possible thing is the funniest thing," he offers. "It also plays with horror because if you're a little uncomfortable in a comedic way, you're primed for a big scare."

The trio credits their actors with being instrumental in maintaining the film's balance between comedy and horror. "We owe a huge debt to them," Tzannes says before singling out Cook's lead performance as Chase. "On the page, that guy was a little grating like any young filmmaker," he explains. "But Brennan made him so likable." The director also believes the film's eventual turn to horror wouldn't be nearly as effective without the cast's ability to ground the story in some very human stakes. "Everyone found a way to make these characters very likable, which makes it more tragic at the end," he notes.

Despite the film's early emphasis on comedy, the Fango readership can be assured that *Found Footage* spirals into a gripping horror movie that boasts spook-a-blast jolts and existential dread in equal measure. Tzannes defers to San Miguel and Souza here, citing their enthusiasm for the genre as the backbone of their film's descent into terror. "They were the ones who kept reminding me this is a horror film," he says. "That's what's so cool about this idea: it starts as a mockumentary about people making a horror movie, then it becomes an actual horror movie." Both San Miguel and Souza were eager to play in this sandbox, with the former detailing his love of the genre: "There was a period after high school where I only watched horror movies. I just binged that stuff." Meanwhile, Souza's love of cryptids provided the film's hook. "I've always loved Bigfoot, and I just love folklore," he offers. "It's a tale you've heard a million times, but I thought it would be really cool if it were actually scary."

The trio's fondness for horror is evident throughout the final stretch of *Found Footage*, which cleverly indulges the familiar tropes of the "spam in a cabin" genre: ominous basements, demonic possession, the impossibility of escape. Souza is especially proud of how the trio navigated the crucial question of why Chase and his crew don't leave once it's obvious they're being haunted. "That was my favorite part of the script, and I actually thought it was the funniest part, weirdly enough," he explains about a sequence that finds the crew inexplicably trapped in their location. Imagine Buñuel's *The Exterminating Angel*, only a guy in a bigfoot suit is involved.

Executive producers Radio Silence also influenced this turn of events, particularly one of their earlier anthology films. "They did this movie called *Southbound* where there's a loop," Tzannes explains before San Miguel reminds him that the idea started as a joke. "We were trying to think of something and you were like 'what if they just couldn't drive?'" You laughed it off, but I was like 'that's it!'" he recalls in an exchange that confirms the film is an authentic testament to the chaotic creative process.

While it might be an unconventional celebration of movie magic, *Found Footage* is inspired by the same affection that's guided similar tributes. "In order to properly make a satire of something, it has to come from a place of love," Tzannes insists before outlining the trio's future ambitions. "Point blank, we really want to be the next guys in horror comedy," he proclaims, noting that there's room for this at a table that's become crowded by weighty grief and trauma. "There's a lot of great horror movies coming out right now, but they're a little more traumatic horror," he notes. "I really love those movies, but I think we have something in movies that is both really funny and really scary." 💀

I THINK I'VE SEEN
THIS FILM BEFORE...
FOUND FOOTAGE SPIRALS INTO A GRIPPING HORROR MOVIE THAT BOASTS SPOOK-A-BLAST JOLTS AND EXISTENTIAL DREAD.

DOOM SCROLLING TAKES ON A WHOLE NEW MEANING IN KIYOSHI KUROSAWA'S *CLOUD*.

THE LEGENDARY DIRECTOR RETURNS WITH PERHAPS HIS TIMELIEST FILM YET.

Price GOUGING

Kiyoshi Kurosawa On Cloud

By Amber T
Interpreted and translated by Junko Goda

HELL HATH NO FURY LIKE AN ONLINE SHOPPER SCORNED.

There's a moment in *Cloud*, the latest genre-bender from Japanese filmmaking legend Kiyoshi Kurosawa, that made my stomach drop in fear. Our lead, avaricious Internet reseller Ryosuke Yoshii (Masaki Suda, *Cube*, *The Boy and the Heron*) and his aimless but charming girlfriend Akiko (Kotone Furukawa, also starring in this year's bizarre Japanese horror *Best Regards to All* – Fango readers, you'll want to keep an eye on that one, too) sit on a bus, both peering intently at Yoshii's smartphone, which displays a realtor listing for a new lakeside abode. From the seat behind them, a dark figure slowly edges its way into frame, sucking the air and noise out of the scene entirely.

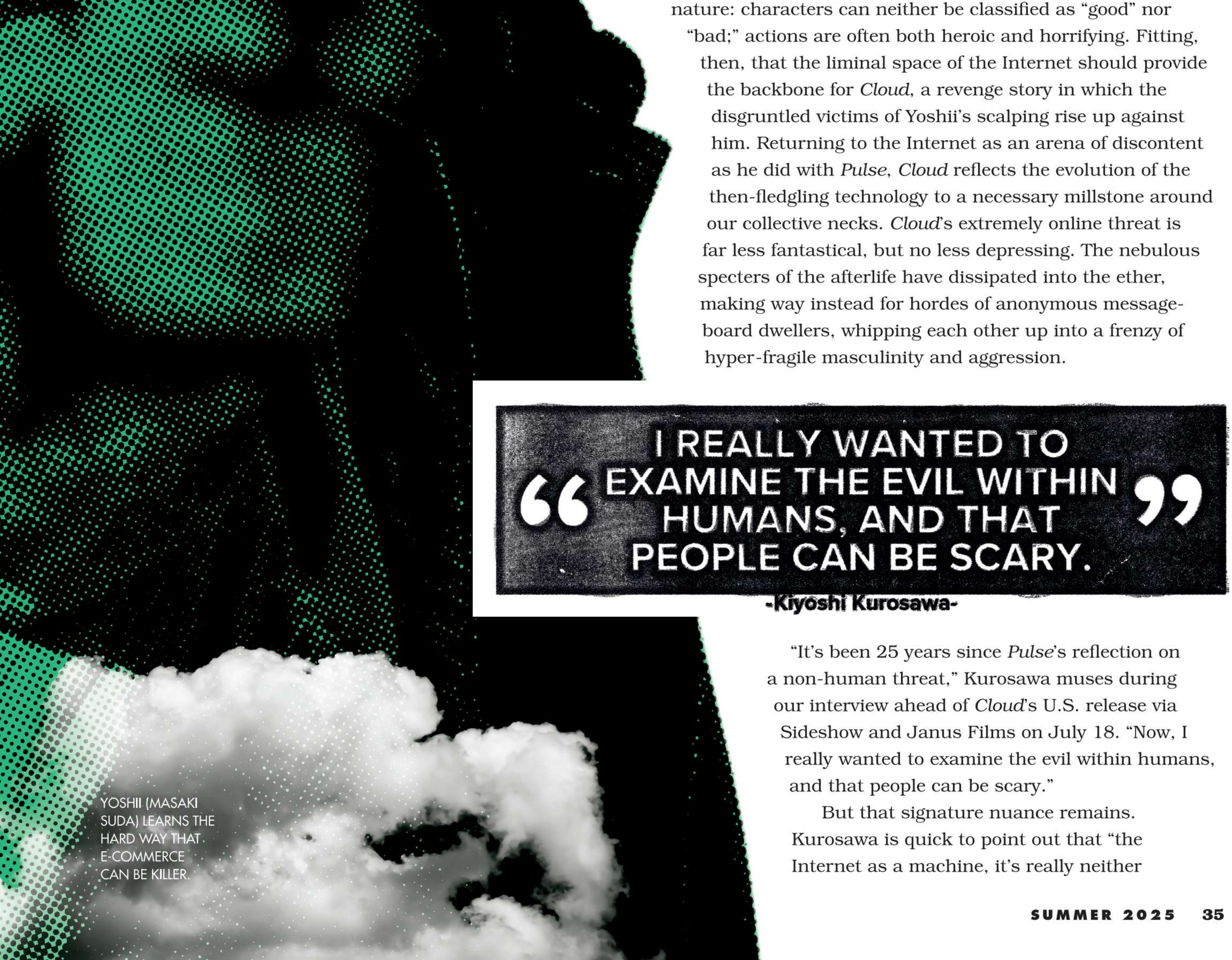
Anyone familiar with Kurosawa's particular brand of creeping dread will know exactly the kind of skin-prickling fear his work tends to induce. This is, after all, the director who cursed us all to sleepless nights with *that* ghost scene in his 2001 horror opus *Pulse*. While *Cloud* is less purely horror than many of his previous offerings (the film was born from Kurosawa's desire to make an action movie), this moment alone justifies its inclusion in the genre conversation. It's a short scene, lasting a few seconds, but you'll undoubtedly spend the rest of the film in a state of queasy unease, waiting for the other shoe to drop, for this mysterious specter to return and deliver the answers that we so humanly crave.

It's in this uncertainty that Kurosawa thrives. Famously cerebral, Kurosawa pics aren't known for their black-and-white nature: characters can neither be classified as "good" nor "bad;" actions are often both heroic and horrifying. Fitting, then, that the liminal space of the Internet should provide the backbone for *Cloud*, a revenge story in which the disgruntled victims of Yoshii's scalping rise up against him. Returning to the Internet as an arena of discontent as he did with *Pulse*, *Cloud* reflects the evolution of the then-fledgling technology to a necessary millstone around our collective necks. *Cloud*'s extremely online threat is far less fantastical, but no less depressing. The nebulous specters of the afterlife have dissipated into the ether, making way instead for hordes of anonymous message-board dwellers, whipping each other up into a frenzy of hyper-fragile masculinity and aggression.

> "I REALLY WANTED TO EXAMINE THE EVIL WITHIN HUMANS, AND THAT PEOPLE CAN BE SCARY."
>
> -Kiyoshi Kurosawa-

"It's been 25 years since *Pulse*'s reflection on a non-human threat," Kurosawa muses during our interview ahead of *Cloud*'s U.S. release via Sideshow and Janus Films on July 18. "Now, I really wanted to examine the evil within humans, and that people can be scary."

But that signature nuance remains. Kurosawa is quick to point out that "the Internet as a machine, it's really neither



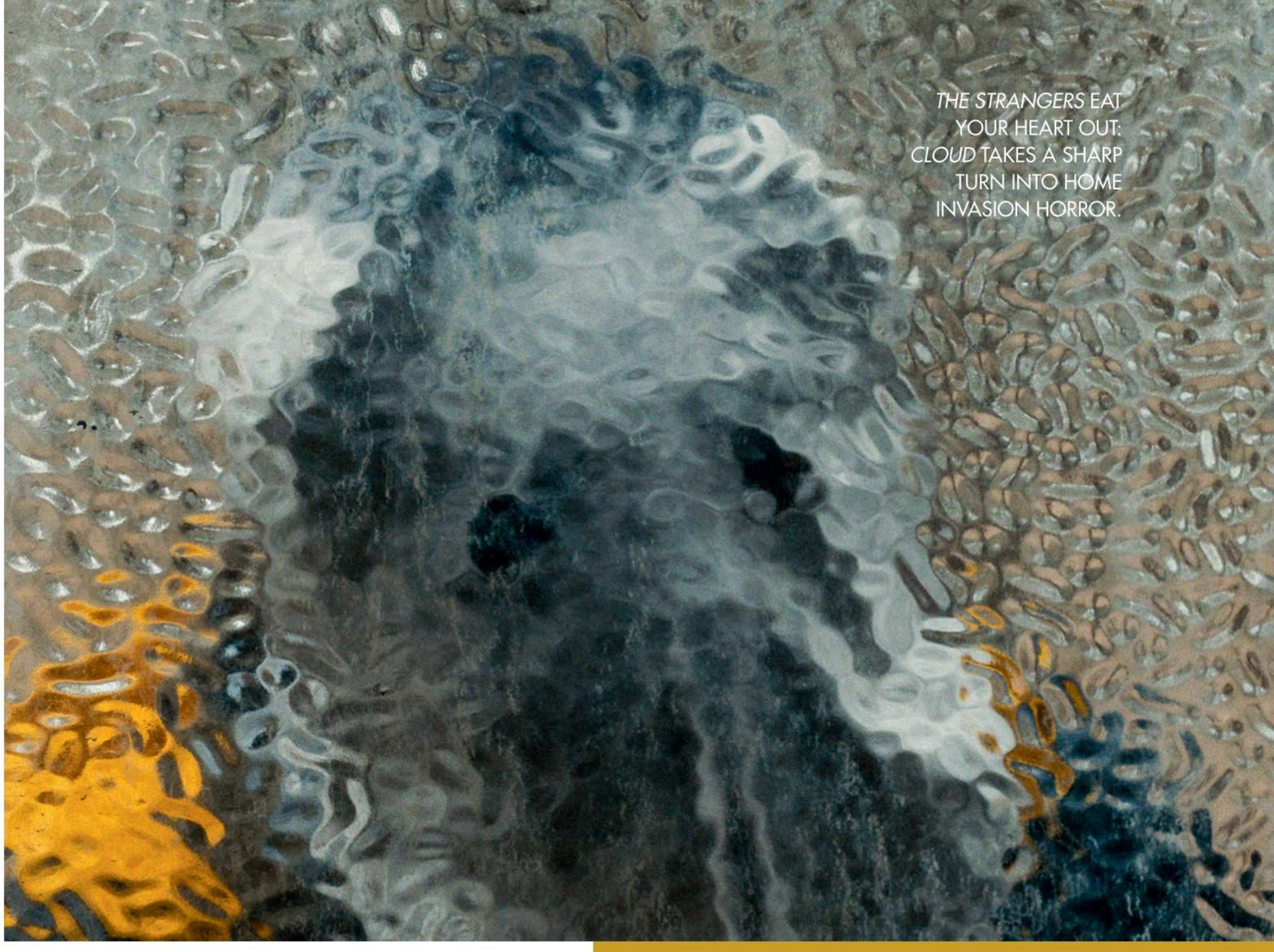
YOSHII (MASAKI SUDA) LEARNS THE HARD WAY THAT E-COMMERCE CAN BE KILLER.

good nor bad." Like a tool, it's all down to how you use it, and the boundaries you impose upon yourself and the ideas you're having blasted into your brain on the daily.

"The Internet has this power to expand ideas or feelings, but also concentrate them into almost a singularity," Kurosawa goes on to explain. "Using these things for good is wonderful, but on the flip side, using the internet for evil, it can even take one's own [desire for] vengeance, which can be really concentrated."

This idea of concentration gives *Cloud* one of its many meanings; the gathering of small droplets increasingly emboldened by their proximity to one another, creating a mass of misplaced rage that casts a shadow of impending doom. As spending even a few seconds on Twitter proves, the Internet provides an ideal breeding ground for these anonymity-fueled dogpiles. As one of Yoshii's many spurned customers puts it: people like us keep billowing up… like clouds in the sky.

The phrase "anti-capitalist" has been thrown around a lot when defining and discussing *Cloud*, but for Kurosawa, it's not that simple. To anyone who's ever been a victim of a dodgy dropshipper or an eBay scammer, Yoshii's behavior is more than enough to justify his enemies' lust for justice. *Cloud* is partially based on the real-life experience of Kurosawa's friend, an Internet reseller, and the director is quick to point out that reselling is just a mode of survival, no different from the tried-and-true "buy low, sell high" technique that has formed the core of the modern capitalist mainframe. While the film



THE STRANGERS EAT YOUR HEART OUT: *CLOUD* TAKES A SHARP TURN INTO HOME INVASION HORROR.

IT'S IN THIS UNCERTAINTY THAT KUROSAWA THRIVES. FAMOUSLY CEREBRAL, KUROSAWA PICS AREN'T KNOWN FOR THEIR BLACK-AND-WHITE NATURE.

MASATAKA KUBOTA'S MURAOKA IS ALL FIRED UP.

is neither particularly sympathetic nor condemning (Kurosawa films aren't exactly in the business of moral scolding), *Cloud* makes no bones about the fact that Yoshii is a victim of this never-ending cycle, just as anyone else.

"People accidentally fall into our current state of capitalism," Kurosawa expands, "We're in an era where making money is an ambition. But the question arises, what is the money for? Now, you're making money just to continue making money. That seems to be the goal in our current age." And sure enough, as Yoshii watches his latest glut of fake designer goods snapped up by unsuspecting buyers, a small smile briefly flickers across his face, only to be quickly replaced by the insatiable urge to start the process all over again.

Kurosawa's movies have always felt like a particularly nihilistic meditation on the modern sociological circumstances we find ourselves in, with isolation being a recurring theme in everything from 1997's *Cure* to 2016's *Creepy*. The characters of Kurosawa's worlds often drift through their narratives in a state of disassociation, stood alone in frames or blocked in a way that puts a literal barrier between them and their family or peers. Alongside *Cloud*, in 2024 Kurosawa released *Chime*, a hard-to-obtain (but well worth your time spent searching) 40-minute sliver of pure terror that follows Matsuoka, a schoolteacher (Mutsuo Yoshioka) plagued by a sound that only he can hear. While the auteur approached *Chime* and *Cloud* "completely differently," they undoubtedly share similar themes, especially with regards to the internal solitude of their protagonists, and how this contributes to the breakdown of the world around them.

"They [*Cloud*'s Yoshii and *Chime*'s Matsuoka] don't have anyone to really talk to about their inner feelings, and I think that's a coincidence how I wrote them." Reflecting his frequent use of rear-projected transitional shots of characters driving away from the mess they've made, Kurosawa adds, "In the end, they're not necessarily destroyed by their actions. Instead, they accept the circumstances. Although it is a dark path, they don't self-destruct from what they've done. They decide to move forward. Perhaps to a darker future, but they're still moving forward." It's this subtle yet sinister sense that you're entering the unknown that makes Kurosawa films so unnerving on a very primal level, like missing a step on the stairs in the dark.

MIYAKE (AMANE OKAYAMA) TRIES TO REASON WITH TAKIMOTO (YOSHIYOSHI ARAKAWA); IT'S NOT GOING WELL.

Despite the humble claim that his films are not "intentionally being scary," for Kurosawa, who cut his teeth as one of the key players of Japan's V-cinema movement in the '90s, alongside fellow genre mainstays Takashi Miike and Hideo Nakata, fear comes from the form itself. Lensed by cinematographer Yasuyuki Sasaki, *Cloud* retains much of Kurosawa's signature visual flare: notably, his ability to turn a totally mundane space, such as an unassuming apartment or labyrinthine warehouse, into the stuff of nightmares, where unspoken horrors lurk in the shadows.

"My generation, we grew up shooting and watching everything in film, and I think that has a strong influence on my tendencies. Shooting on film, you might be pointing your camera at a dark room, but on film, and especially on film, it'll show up as darker than what you remember seeing. Because it's film, there's almost a presence beyond that darkness," he explains, referencing that rich texture specific to film. "Another thing that film can do is be a little bit blurry and hazy. Especially when it's on a big screen, you might notice things that you hadn't noticed by looking at it yourself. It might be a room that I'm familiar with, but there's this unnerving mysteriousness about it."

With three films added to his storied filmography just last year (alongside shooting *Chime* in September 2023 and *Cloud* in November and December of the same year, Kurosawa remade his own crime thriller *Serpent's Path*, this time in French), Kurosawa shows no signs of slowing down. Following a few years away from horror, *Cloud* and *Chime* seem to signal an ironically timely return from a director who deals in dread on an often-apocalyptic scale. To wrap up our chat, Kurosawa teases that he is working on another horror film, citing a desire to "really jump back into [something] purely scary." Watch this space, readers, but beware – you never know what could be staring back at you from the shadows. 💀

CLOUD TAKES AIM AT CAPITALISM.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SIDESHOW AND JANUS FILMS

TROMA

SHOCK AND AWE

MACON BLAIR DELIVERS A RIOTOUS NEW TAKE ON TROMA'S THE TOXIC AVENGER

BY ROCCO T. THOMPSON

THIS IS NOT YOUR FATHER'S TOXIE.

Since opening Fantastic Fest in 2023, Troma fans have seen neither mottled green hide nor mop handle of Macon Blair's reboot of the legendary New Jersey-based independent studio's tent pole, *The Toxic Avenger*, but the monster hero will finally be hitting cinemas this August thanks to Cineverse. "It had to marinate for a while," smiles Blair. "Cineverse came along and they were enthusiastic about it in a way that, even though it took a minute to get here, I feel like it's a victory!"

PETER DINKLAGE PLAYS WINSTON GOOZE, AN UPDATE TO 1984'S MELVIN FERD JUNKO III.

Entertainment news sites would have you believe the film was deemed "unreleasable," a term that still perplexes Blair as much as it does anyone who saw it during its world premiere. "The more mainstream streamers, it just wasn't their vibe, [but] somehow that term got out there and made it seem like it was so filthy and so disgusting, and it's not. It's warm-hearted. It's kind of sweet!" In reality, the *Toxic Avenger*'s problem seemed to be how to market a big-budget remake of a no-budget cult classic from the most notorious name in offend-all-watchers schlock five decades running. But for its star, Peter Dinklage, the film's resistance to easy categorization only speaks to the strength of what they created. "I think marketing people get confused when they don't know what approach to take with it," he says. "[But] for me, that's a positive. People are hungry for something unique, that's what art is, you're [not] delivering a product like a Big Mac."

He and Blair go on to declare that with so much content being churned out, studios are less likely to take on eccentric movies like *The Toxic Avenger*, which is why finding a partner like Cineverse who will step up to the plate in supporting the creative vision is essential. "They just got it," raves Blair. "It's a sense of humor, a tone, a vibe, and they had a particular taste and this fit in with that. I'm glad for it to have taken a little bit longer so that we could end up where we [are], and I'm especially psyched that it's going to have a theatrical component." Even better? The version hitting cinemas is the never-before-seen unrated cut with additional material added that fans need to show up to see. "I feel like people would have demanded a *little something extra* now that it's unrated," the director smirks. "I think it'll get a laugh when people see it."

The Toxic Avenger spins the tale of everyman Winston Gooze (Dinklage), a resident of St. Roma's Village, a town suffering in the shadow of pharmaceutical behemoth BTH where he works as a lowly janitor. Lorded over by a Bryan Johnson-like CEO named Bob Garbinger (Kevin Bacon), BTH shills "bio-boosters" to the residents of St. Roma's, promising them health and wellness while dumping chemical pollutants into the water supply. Still

THE CAPED CUSTODIAN.

PHOTOS YANA BLAJEVA, COURTESY OF LEGENDARY AND CINEVERSE

reeling from the recent death of his wife, Winston's struggle to provide for his stepson, Wade (Jacob Tremblay) gets even more complicated when he's diagnosed with a fatal brain tumor. In a desperate attempt to change his rotten luck, Winston runs afoul of Garbinger's goons and is left for dead in a vat of chemicals – transforming him into a mutant superhero dead-set on bringing down BTH for good.

The Toxic Avenger is Blair's second spin as a film director after 2017's *I Don't Feel at Home in This World Anymore*, and for a lifelong Toxie fan, it was an opportunity too good to pass up, having seen the original at exactly the right time in his development as a young film buff. "My friends and I were just getting into making our own movies," he recalls. "[And] all these movies that I was so in love with, *Star Wars* or *Jaws* or whatever, they were these huge movies that you couldn't really fathom how they were made. The original *Toxic Avenger* looked like a movie that people had [shot] with their friends over the weekend. It was something that I could do."

That homemade appeal was top of mind for the filmmaker while deciding how best to approach updating the material. "This was definitely a bigger budget than anything I've ever been associated with, but I didn't want to write anything that would seem like it was out of the realm of what a Troma movie would be," he explains. "[It was like] mentally putting bumpers up to be like, 'Well, we can go a little bit bigger with *this*, but [we need to] keep *that* feeling like we did it in somebody's backyard.' I think that [limited] size is part of the Toxie charm." In this way, Blair hoped not just to bring the Troma magic to a new audience, but make longtime fans happy, as well as the men who birthed the tutu-wearing defender of the downtrodden themselves: "I wanted to make sure that Lloyd and Michael felt like we were not taking their baby and crapping all over it."

Lloyd Kaufman, who served as producer on the project with longtime creative partner Michael Herz, visited the set in Sofia, Bulgaria, to offer his characteristically offbeat advice. "He suggested that I have somebody get suffocated by giant boobs," chuckles Blair. "This was in the middle of

POST-MUTATION, TOXIE IS PORTRAYED ONSCREEN BY LUISA GUERREIRO, WHO STUDIED DINKLAGE'S MOVEMENTS AND EXPRESSIONS. (DINKLAGE ALSO VOICED THE CHARACTER.)

COVID, so there wasn't a lot of wiggle room at the last minute to be like, 'Let's create giant tits and a whole new kill sequence!' But I appreciated his ideas for sure." Herz, always the more retiring of the two men, kept his distance, but frequently checked in to offer well-wishes via email. "They were very supportive and enthusiastic. I was glad that they seemed like they were having a good time with it."

Blair's screenplay afforded him a chance to channel the balls-out, juvenile hilarity that endeared him to Troma early on, while putting his own spin on it, of course. "For better or worse, [the jokes] are whatever makes me laugh," he says. "I didn't feel like I needed to be deliberately distasteful because that was expected, but I also didn't feel like I needed to be super safe. [The] overall concept for this movie was that it was going to be willfully stupid on one hand, and also very earnest and sincere on the other." That sincerity required casting a lead actor who could thread the needle between the film's exaggerated silliness and its bleeding heart, and Dinklage was up to the task. The two became pals when Blair's debut feature premiered at Sundance with Dinklage on the features jury. "I was envious of the work he'd done with [*Blue Ruin* director] Jeremy Saulnier. He was just sort of doing the movies that I wanted to be a part of," Dinklage says. "I met him at Sundance for a beer and we just hit it off right away. It was like I knew him forever. We just talked about movies and everything and we stayed in touch. And then this came about."

"THE OVERALL CONCEPT FOR THIS MOVIE WAS THAT IT WAS GOING TO BE WILLFULLY STUPID ON ONE HAND, AND ALSO VERY EARNEST AND SINCERE ON THE OTHER."

– MACON BLAIR

"I thought that we have maybe 25 minutes at the top of the movie to get people on board with this character before he transforms," explains Blair. "There's a reason why most *Game of Thrones* fans would probably say that Tyrion Lannister is their favorite. Peter has that charismatic thing: he can be

very grave and also has this very light-hearted sense of humor."

Dinklage was also in step with Blair's desire to set his Toxie apart from Melvin Ferd Junko III, the character played by Mark Torgl in 1984. "We already knew that it was going to be more a father-son situation," he says, insisting that he wanted his *Toxic Avenger* to have genuine emotional stakes compared to what came before. "[Winston Gooze] is this stepdad that's trying to connect with this kid, and he's not very good at it. When he does transform into the mutant, you're rooting for him to battle the bad guys but mainly you're rooting for him to resolve some connection with this kid, because all they have in the world is each other."

Dinklage, for his part, loved working alongside Tremblay and welcomed the opportunity to tackle a unique hero with a heartfelt struggle. "I think

THE EVER-CHAMELEONIC ELIJAH WOOD AS FRITZ GARBINGER.

TOXIE LOOKS LIKE HE'S NERVOUS BEFORE A JOB INTERVIEW. SO LIKE US!

heroes come in all forms," he says. "I love Marvel movies, but it's time to give the underdog a shot and open up the definition of what a hero is. Humans are clumsier and more awkward than your traditional superheroes, and it's fun how Macon played with that form and subverted it."

The cast also features Taylour Paige as J.J. Doherty, an unexpected ally in Toxie's mission to take down BTH, Elijah Wood as Fritz Garbinger, the ghoulish enforcer brother of Bob, and, of course, Kevin Bacon as the big bad himself. "That was one of those where we were like, 'Let's offer it to him. He's probably going to say no,'" recalls Blair. "But he called up and he said he really liked the script. He may disagree with me on this, but it seems like lately he's playing a lot of villainous roles, and even though [Bob] is a bad guy, he's very silly. I suspect that it was fun for him to get to go into this more cartoonish [mode] than people are used to seeing from him."

Once Winston Gooze mutates, Toxie is played by English actress Luisa Guerreiro, with Dinklage lending his voice to the character throughout. The star is effusive in his praise for the work Luisa does onscreen, saying "[It was] basically like the Andy Serkis school of acting: she studied my movements, my mannerisms, everything. It's sort of like my heart and

THE BIG BAD BROTHERS GARBINGER: FRITZ (WOOD) AND KEVIN BACON AS BOB.

soul [onscreen], but Luisa did [those] long hours in that heavy makeup. She did Toxie brilliantly." The suit itself was designed with the assistance of concept artists Vanessa Menendez and Jonas Goonface and realized by Millennium FX to pay homage to the original's look while prioritizing Guerreiro's ability to emote. "I'm a big fan of the suit," says Blair. "I was aware that because he's an iconic character and because we were doing a kind of redesign on it, some people were going to be bummed, but I just really like that we struck a balance." Blair specifically mentions the transformation scene as one of his personal favorite moments, where he chose to forgo the more *American Werewolf in London*-style body effects showcase for something a bit more expressionistic. "We went in a more *Vertigo* direction where it was like a bad dream as opposed to a literal goopy goop situation. We had a lot of fun toying with different kinds of psychedelic light effects and silhouettes. I'm really happy with how that turned out!"

Despite the delay, Macon Blair's *The Toxic Avenger* seems to be hitting cinemas at the exact right moment. Troma's satirical edge can often be overlooked for the fountains of foamy green slime, but Toxie did emerge from Kaufman's concerns with the environment, corporate malfeasance, and governmental indifference towards community health, all themes that the update expands upon. But even its creator and star never expected how much sharper its lampooning of predatory insurance companies and pharmaceutical avarice would hit even two years removed from its premiere.

"It is a visibly ridiculous movie, but when you're writing you can't help but sort of [funnel how] you're thinking about things into these characters either in a very overt way or in a subtle way," muses Blair. "And I think what rose to the top of it was just this idea that rich people get away with anything and poor people are constantly victimized by it. It's not revelatory, but in the context of a weird mutant who fights people with a mop, that idea is in there somewhere."

Dinklage doubles down on the film's growing relevance, likening *The Toxic Avenger* to *Robocop*, another entertainment-first social satire that may be silly on the surface but is subversive in its convictions and its attitude towards the seeking of justice. "Yes, it's a fictional monster movie, but this is happening. It's not yet on the level of monsters coming back to life out of toxic waste, but give it time, and perhaps Winston Gooze will be for real!"

DOWN (BUT NOT OUT) IN TROMAVILLE: WRITER/DIRECTOR MACON BLAIR AND FRIEND ON THE SET OF *THE TOXIC AVENGER*.

SURVIVAL IS A LONG SHOT

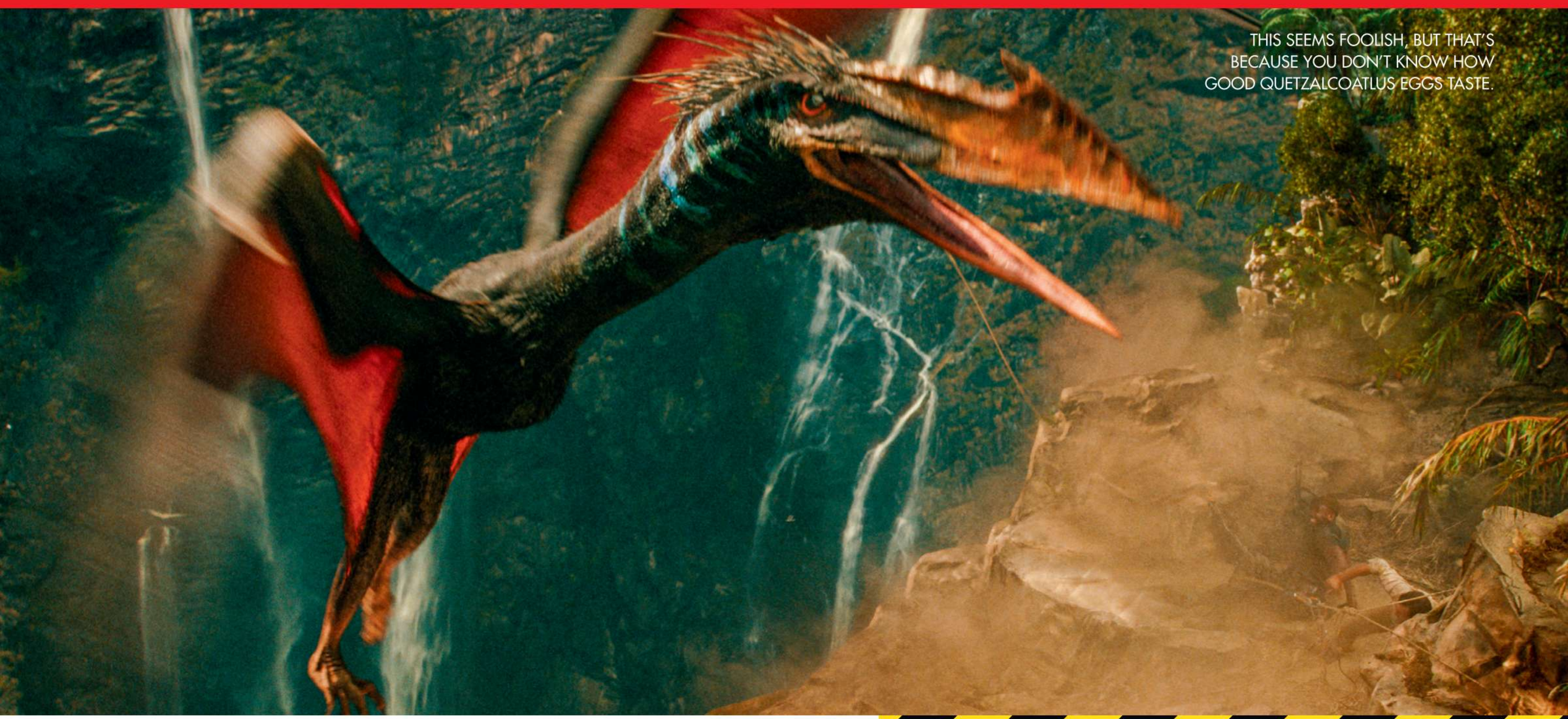
GARETH EDWARDS ON

JURASSIC WORLD
REBIRTH

By Michael Gingold

THE MONSTERS AND GODZILLA DIRECTOR TACKLES A NEW KIND OF CREATURE FEATURE.

Everything old is new again, again. At this writing, now that *Sinners* has become a major critical and box office hit, the naysayers who want to pigeonhole horror as a schlock genre are coming out of the woodwork claiming, "It's not a horror film." It reminds this longtime Fangorian of 1993, when we put *Jurassic Park* on the cover, and were derided by fans questioning why we were giving such coverage to something that was "not horror." But budget and stature have nothing to do with a movie's genre, and some of the dinosaur sequences in *Jurassic Park* are now in the pantheon of cinematic terror.



THIS SEEMS FOOLISH, BUT THAT'S BECAUSE YOU DON'T KNOW HOW GOOD QUETZALCOATLUS EGGS TASTE.

And Gareth Edwards, director of *Jurassic World Rebirth*, has no problem using the H-word when discussing the franchise and his new entry. "I feel like the original *Jurassic Park* was always a horror film in the Witness Protection Program," he says, "pretending it was family adventure, but we all knew deep down it was a horror movie. The T. rex attack in the Jeep at night is probably one of the most brilliant pieces of horror ever filmed."

That's the feeling he aimed to recapture in *Rebirth*, the seventh in the *Jurassic* series and essentially a reboot after the *Park* and *World* trilogies. A new cast is headed by longtime *Jurassic* fan Scarlett Johansson as covert operations expert Zora Bennett, leading a team with various special skills to the long-abandoned island research facility for the initial park where all manner of prehistoric critters still roam free. Their goal is to retrieve DNA from a trio of species that could have life-saving properties for humans, though of course they (and a shipwrecked family they come across) find their own lives in extreme jeopardy from both familiar dinos and a few new mutations.

Also starring Mahershala Ali, Jonathan Bailey, Rupert Friend, Manuel Garcia-Rulfo and Ed Skrein, *Jurassic World Rebirth* marks the return of original *Jurassic* and *The Lost World* scripter David Koepp to this universe, has Steven Spielberg once again on board as an executive producer, and is a bit of a change of pace for Edwards, who spoke to Fango while the film was in postproduction. Having won praise for his subtle approach to presenting giant creatures in *Monsters* and *Godzilla*, he's now at the helm of a film in which the beasts are front and center...

DR. HENRY LOOMIS (JONATHAN BAILEY), WE KNOW THAT LOOK, AND WE KNOW WHAT YOU'RE THINKING. STOP IT.

PHOTOS BY JASIN BOLAND, COURTESY OF UNIVERSAL PICTURES AND AMBLIN ENTERTAINMENT

Your previous monster movies emphasized the power of suggestion, and this is a franchise with a more direct approach to its creatures. So was it an adjustment to take on this film?

It was kind of a relief, in terms of, I think I've secretly been trying to make a *Jurassic* film my whole career – not so secretly, sometimes. I love monster movies, obviously, but the great thing about *Jurassic* and making a film with dinosaurs is that you can't dismiss them. I believe one reason that scenario is probably so popular is that they can't be written off as just fantasy. There's something very primal about it, where I think it's embedded very deep in our DNA. It's this instinctive fear that at some point, the bigger creature is going to come and take us from our little burrows in the ground and kill us. As humans, we've long since killed off all our predators, but I think the feeling that it's just a matter of time until one of them turns up and we lose our domination of the world does feel instinctively correct. And that's why audiences enjoy watching films like this so much.

I also love the cold opens you can have in films like this, like *Jurassic Park* or *Jaws*, where you don't need to know the backstory, or introduce anyone. You immediately pull the audience in. The best version of these movies is: you start eating your popcorn, and the title comes up and you suddenly witness this horrific event. And later you realize, when the end credits come on, that you haven't touched your popcorn at all because you've been sucked into this whole journey. That was the appeal, to try and make a film that works on that level.

Talking about bringing our predators back, *Jurassic Park* started as a cautionary tale about science gone too far. Does that theme carry over into this one?

Yeah; I think it's less a theme than probably just a truth about humanity. I think all stories, whatever they may be, when they're at their best, have some underlying meaning behind them. The worst thing you can do is sit there and go, 'I want my film to have this theme,' and then start writing a story including that. What happens is you get attracted to stories that resonate with you, or that you just really enjoy telling, because there is some weight there, some meat on the bones. And I think horror, and *Jurassic* films, are always best served when someone in the movie kind of deserves it, or there's a kind of retribution. Then it's hard to dismiss it; it's like the universe balancing itself out. In *Jurassic*, science is the main reason the dinosaurs are brought back, and man's relationship to nature becomes the big theme of the movie.

David Koepp wrote this screenplay, and he wrote the original, and I was always fascinated because I read Michael Crichton's book when I was a kid before I even saw Spielberg's film. I love the movie, but I have never read Michael Crichton's first version of that script, or any version of it. So it was very hard to know who came up with what: Steven, David or Michael. And it has been one of my favorite experiences working with David on this. I recently rewatched *Jurassic Park*; I watched it a lot when I first got the job, and then I stopped for a while because it's such an incredibly high bar to achieve, and quite an intimidating one, and also, I didn't want it to sort of infect our movie too much. But I recently put it on the other day, and I suddenly felt like I knew which lines and ideas were David's, because *Rebirth*, I feel, has all the same sort of qualities. And also, there was a definite license in there to be scary. I don't want to ruin it for people, but it didn't shy away from that.

So you would call this horror? I recall Spielberg would not refer to *Jurassic Park* as a monster movie, but it sounds like you're kind of embracing the horror on this one.

I am to you because we're doing this for FANGORIA [*laughs*]. I'd probably change my tune in a different interview. But yeah, I'll admit it here for sure. But one of the things that was super-important to Steven and David, and we had one of the world's leading paleontologists on this film, was that everyone was insisting, 'We're

THIS IS A JOB FOR RFK JR: DIRECTOR GARETH EDWARDS AND FIRST AD JACK RAVENSCROFT NAVIGATE THE BEST WAY TO HAUL A BUNCH OF DINOSAUR CARRION HOME.

"I LOVE MONSTER MOVIES, OBVIOUSLY, BUT THE GREAT THING ABOUT *JURASSIC* AND MAKING A FILM WITH DINOSAURS IS THAT YOU CAN'T DISMISS THEM."

– GARETH EDWARDS

RIGHT WHEN YOU LEAST EXPECT IT: A *FREE WILLY* HOMAGE.

trying to do these things as animals, not monsters' – even though at the heart of the film, it definitely feels like a monster movie at times. The way we translated that was, in one of the very early conversations with the visual effects team, I said, 'I don't want anybody animating a dinosaur without a visual reference of [a real] animal actually behaving like that.' So we did a deep dive into natural history footage, and YouTube clips, just grabbing a massive library of all kinds of animalistic behavior. And whatever the scene was that we were doing, we would look at the way animals really move and behave and try to catch their prey, and riff off of that body movement and those sorts of 'performances.'

So every time a visual effect was submitted, we'd see it all clean with the animation, and then if we wanted they could press a button and it would bring up, in a separate window, the animal that it was copying. Obviously the animators had a lot of creative input, but some of them were quite hilarious. You'd see people at home trying to get their dogs or cats a cameo in the movie by coaching them into doing something that one of the dinosaurs does. It'll make some good behind-the-scenes extras.

And your dinosaurs are a mix of new species and old favorites from the previous movies?

Yeah, that's the fast way to say it. I mean, there are certain species of dinosaur that it would be a crime against cinema to not put them in. I think it's no secret now, it's been mentioned: There's a T. rex scene in our movie that was in the original *Jurassic Park* book and also in the original screenplay. I didn't realize that at first; I'd read the book when I was around 16, I believe, so it was out of my mind. And when I read the *Rebirth* script, I wasn't even thinking about it; it just felt appropriate that there was this raft sequence with the family in this situation with the T. rex. It was really one of the high points of the screenplay, and to me, that scene alone was worth making the film for. It was only after we shot it and were back in the edit that someone mentioned it was in the original

SCARLETT JOHANSSON VS. A T-REX. YOU KNOW WHAT? WE THINK SHE'S GOT THIS.

FLANKED BY FEARSOME FINNED FREAKS!

> "I THINK HORROR, AND *JURASSIC* FILMS, ARE ALWAYS BEST SERVED WHEN SOMEONE IN THE MOVIE KIND OF DESERVES IT, OR THERE'S A KIND OF RETRIBUTION."
>
> - GARETH EDWARDS

screenplay, and that it had been put in this film because Steven and David missed the idea of it ever appearing in a movie.

So then we went out to the shops and I bought one of these making-of-*Jurassic* books, and it had some of Steven's storyboards in it. And it was truly surreal to have already storyboarded and shot a sequence, and then have that magical moment where it was like, 'Well, this is what Steven would have done,' and get to see his boards and stuff, which I didn't even know about. I'm glad I didn't, because I probably would have just stolen all his ideas [*laughs*].

So there are classical dinosaurs on this island, but also a few hybrid versions. It was interesting designing those creatures, because obviously everyone knows what a dinosaur looks like, and we didn't try to reinvent ours. But when it came to the mutated ones, that was kind of a blank canvas. There are essentially two main ones in the movie, and one of them, as I was reading the script, I knew exactly what that looked like; I could see it in my peripheral vision. But those were the ones that took us the longest; we only locked the designs just prior to Christmas, really. You'll see that there will probably not be any toys of these things coming out in the shops this year alongside the film, because it took us a while to figure out what they looked like. On a *Jurassic* film, as you can imagine, there are a lot of toys, and you have to set up all the factories and everything, and you have to finish the designs a year out from the film being released. Thankfully, I've worked on a few films with some amazing people now, and I just called up all my friends who were creature designers and let everybody take a swing at it. So it's a bit of a hybrid of lots of different people's work.

And it's super-amazing now seeing the final results; every day is a bit like Christmas. I get to go to work in the mornings and see all the visual effects shots come in. We've done so much to get the film to work, with just text on the screen saying 'T. rex' or 'Quetzalcoatlus' or something. We'd gotten used to the movie like that, and tried to have it all working with the characters, and now these shots start turning up with a giant Mosasaur in them or whatever, and everything just goes up a notch. It's a bit of a dream scenario. 💀

IMAGINE THE VIRAL VIDEOS THAT HAPPEN IN THE WORLD OF *JURASSIC*.

BY MEREDITH BORDERS

TO KNOW YOU IS TO HUNT YOU: ON THE HOOK WITH I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER

FISHING FOR DETAILS FROM THE DIRECTOR, CO-WRITER AND STARS OF THE HOTLY ANTICIPATED LEGACY SEQUEL.

Stop me if you've heard this one: after a night of partying, a group of teenagers makes a deadly mistake. The friends bury their secret in a desperate attempt to get on with their lives, vowing to never speak of it again. But one year later, an anonymous note arrives in the mail. With growing dread, the recipient opens the envelope and sees the message written in stark capitals: I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER.

No, this isn't 1997, when Jim Gillespie's blockbuster teen horror *I Know What You Did Last Summer* graced screens. Nor is it 1973, when Lois Duncan – the literary queen of young adult thrillers – published the book that kicked off this now decades-old cycle of vengeance.

This is 2025, baby, and The Fisherman is back.

And he's not the only one.

DIRECTOR JENNIFER KAYTIN ROBINSON AND COSTUME DESIGNER MARI-AN CEO SPENT A WHOLE LOT OF TIME LOOKING AT RAIN SLICKERS FOR THE FISHERMAN'S ENSEMB UPDATE.

JENNIFER LOVE HEWITT'S JULIE JAMES IS ONE OF THE ALL-TIME SLASHER FINAL GIRLS.

"The most important thing for me, and for Leah and Sam, was writing a film Jennifer and Freddie wanted to be a part of," says *I Know What You Did Last Summer* co-writer and director Jennifer Kaytin Robinson. "Leah and Sam" refer to Robinson's co-writers, Leah McKendrick and Sam Lansky. And "Jennifer and Freddie" are, of course, Jennifer Love Hewitt and Freddie Prinze Jr., the stars of the original *I Know What You Did Last Summer* and its sequel, 1998's *I Still Know What You Did Last Summer*.

Sequels, legacy and otherwise, come and go in this business, but from the beginning, fans could tell there was something special about this one. No question, Robinson's previous projects are tonally and thematically of a piece with this franchise. 2022's *Do Revenge* is a poppy teen update of the psychological thriller *Strangers on a Train*, while MTV's criminally underseen dark comedy *Sweet/Vicious* follows two college students who become avenging angels on a campus rife with unpenalized sexual assault violations. As for the vengeance throughline spiking its way through her body of work, Robinson jokes, "That's probably a question for my therapist! But what draws me to [these stories] is that they are deeply complex and emotional, but can also be super pulpy and entertaining." Yep, that's exactly what we want out of an *IKWYDLS* sequel.

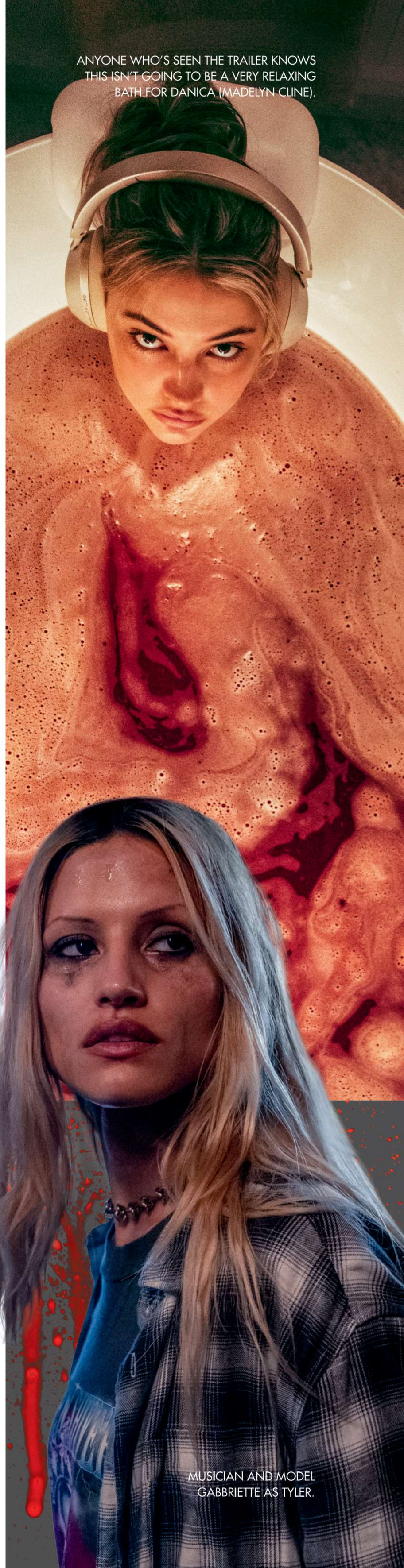
But there's something fans want even more. Once Hewitt and Prinze Jr. were officially announced as part of the cast, the online chatter got noisy. Cacophonous, even.

"I was really scared," Hewitt says of returning to the role of final girl Julie James 27 years after *I Still Know*. "I said yes, and then I had that moment of, 'Oh my God, why did I do that? Why did I say yes? What am I going to do? How am I going to do this? Who is Julie?'"

Prinze Jr. felt a similar reluctance to revisit the persona of Ray Bronson, Julie's boyfriend who survives two movies' worth of attacks by the avenging Fisherman they hit with a car, then dumped off a pier and left for dead. "I was very hesitant," he says. "I had passed on the *She's All That* remake because it felt inorganic to me. It just felt like marketing, and I was really nervous that this would be the same thing."

Luckily Prinze Jr. and Robinson are friends. (Another connection: his wife and original *IKWYDLS* co-star, horror royalty Sarah Michelle Gellar, has an unforgettable role in *Do Revenge*). When Robinson pitched him her take on the film, "It was so different and unique and fun. It still stayed true to the characters, but allowed them that twenty years of growth to see who they've both become now."

Hewitt concurs: "What I loved about Julie [in the original] is that she did not feel like she was necessarily in a



MUSICIAN AND MODEL GABBRIETTE AS TYLER.

horror movie. She just felt like a real girl who was really going through these experiences, who was really feeling these things. Her fear was real; her anxiety was real. The trauma that you knew she was going to carry with her was real."

So when it came to Hewitt's return, "I knew I was coming back as a popcorn moment, but I didn't want it to *feel* like a popcorn moment. I wanted it to feel like we were really seeing Julie James again, and that the person you would see, you'd be proud of how she evolved. But you would still very much see that she has held onto the past and that it has informed her decisions and affected who she is, but she's still that brave girl with moxie."

That growth was important to Lansky, too. "Oh man, we got so intimate," he says of the time he and Robinson spent getting to know Julie and Ray as characters. "We talked a lot about who these people would be if they had had these deeply formative and traumatic experiences." It's a subject that Lansky has interrogated throughout his career as a journalist and author. "How would that survivor's guilt manifest? What kind of anxiety would they have, or paranoia, or fear, or pathology? And I don't want to get too highfalutin about any of it, because it's a fun popcorn movie, but

L-R: STEVIE (SARAH PIDGEON), DANICA (CLINE) AND EVA (CHASE SUI WONDERS).

we definitely endeavored to think really hard about who would these people have become, and how would these experiences have shaped them for good or for ill."

As for the reintroduction of two beloved characters decades after we last saw them, both actors described it as something of a "high school reunion," though neither actually went to a high school reunion of their own. "It's our third frigging movie together, you know what I mean? But it's just twenty-some-odd years apart," Prinze Jr. says.

"The second that we got to be Julie and Ray again, I was like, 'Oh, it's like the sweater,'" Hewitt says, miming putting on a comfy old sweater. "It's like the sweater that you put on and you go, 'Oh, right, this fits. Yep, got it. No worries.'"

"These aren't just forced cameos," Prinze adds. "We get to have a lot of fun in there."

"Fun" is a word I heard a lot from the cast and crew when talking about this movie, both the process of making it and the experience they expect audiences to

PHOTOS BY JASIN BOLAND, COURTESY OF SONY PICTURES

"WHAT DRAWS ME TO REVENGE STORIES IS THAT THEY ARE DEEPLY COMPLEX AND EMOTIONAL, BUT CAN ALSO BE SUPER PULPY AND ENTERTAINING."

- JENNIFER KAYTIN ROBINSON

RAY (FREDDIE PRINZE JR.) IS BACK, WITH A MUCH SMALLER BOAT.

THE NEW MANSLAUGHTER SQUAD: MILO (JONAH HAUER-KING), STEVIE (PIDGEON), EVA (WONDERS), DANICA (CLINE), AND TYRIQ WITHERS AS TEDDY.

have when seeing it. "The movie has so much humor and fun in it," Hewitt says. "It's different from [the first] movie, which was a little bit more serious and wasn't as fun." She pauses, then adds, "Well, maybe that was just true for me, because I was always screaming and crying."

Lansky certainly found the fun in Gillespie's film. "The spirit of fun that suffuses the original is part of why I love the first movie so much, and why it stood the test of time. I think the bonds of friendship that you feel between those characters feel really alive in that movie. And that spirit of fun, and friendship, and connection, felt important to bring into this sequel for this new generation of characters."

Let's hear from the new generation. *Horror Noire*'s Tyriq Withers plays Teddy, and he's joined by Madelyn Cline (*Outer Banks*) as Danica, Chase Sui Wonders (*Bodies Bodies Bodies*) as Ava, Jonah Hauer-King (*World on Fire*) as Milo, and Sarah Pidgeon (*The Wilds*) as Stevie.

"My character is somebody who comes from the town of Southport," Withers tells me of Teddy. "Within the friend group, he's kind of the glue for the friends. He has great energy, he's entertaining, and I'm drawn to characters who have been through things that are similar in my life."

Lest you think Withers has committed manslaughter, he clarifies, "Not saying me and Teddy have a similar timeline, but I think there's depth to who he is and why he is the way he is. And I like to understand characters in that aspect – that's why I was so drawn to Teddy in this story."

It's what drew Robinson to Withers, as well – the director is keenly intuitive at pairing the right actor with the right character. "I don't think what's spoken about enough is the level of casting that she's capable of doing," Prinze Jr. says. "I was just blown away at how perfectly everyone sunk right into these parts."

Robinson adds, "For me, it wasn't just about finding actors who were right for these roles individually, but about how they fit together as a group. Chase, Madelyn, Jonah, Tyriq, and Sarah really feel like they grew up together. That chemistry is so alive on screen."

"I KNEW I WAS COMING BACK AS A POPCORN MOMENT, BUT I DIDN'T WANT IT TO *FEEL* LIKE A POPCORN MOMENT."

- JENNIFER LOVE HEWITT

WHAT IF IT'S SECRETLY SARAH MICHELLE GELLAR IN THAT SLICKER? THAT WOULD BE *SO GOOD*, WOULDN'T IT?

SEEMS LIKE RAY'S STILL A SOUTHPORT MAN, FOR BETTER OR WORSE (MOSTLY WORSE).

Some on-set bonding in Sydney, Australia, helped with that. Tyriq talks about games and concerts the actors shared, "the pure joy and energy" of dancing with his castmates. "I think that's the beauty of making films: the on-screen stuff is magic, but also the off-screen stuff is just as much magic… That energy, it bleeds on camera, no pun intended."

Hewitt adds, "It was lovely to know that they were super bonded during the making of the movie. And still, I think the thing that I was most struck by is their real desire to want to honor the original four," played by Hewitt, Prinze Jr., Gellar and Ryan Phillippe. "We were made to feel like sort of the OGs in this world. We were made to feel very honored and like we mattered, and that what we did mattered."

By all accounts, Robinson set the tone on set: respectful of the OGs, committed to making the scariest movie possible, but allowing plenty of room for creativity and joy. "Jenn, she's an icon," Withers says. "The filmmaking process isn't just 'Action' and 'Cut;' it's the talks in between, the jokes, the games… She's bold in her decision-making and she knows exactly what she wants, and she's going to protect her actors and fight for a movie that she sees as perfect."

"I am very grateful and clear on the fact that they could have just made the movie without me," Hewitt says. "And Jenn's support, for the director to say, 'No, we *have* to have Julie James.' It really touched my heart, and when I think about it, I get very emotional," she smiles. "I fell in love with Jenn instantly."

The one character not invited to join this love fest was The Fisherman, *I Know What You Did Last Summer*'s hook-wielding, death-defying villain.

"Oh god, that's still the worst," Hewitt groans. "I still have trauma. I remember filming the first movie, and the thought that I had in the first two days was like, 'I have to go home now and go to bed. I've just been chased by a murderer all day.' And we were in North Carolina, where there are actually fishermen. So you'd walk to your hotel and you'd see a fisherman. You'd be like, 'Not today. Not today.'"

Withers had a similar experience years later. "Because I'm a tall guy, I got some height, people thought, 'Oh, he wouldn't be scared of The Fisherman.' But every time I saw The Fisherman on set, or even in a test screening or in the fitting, it creates a weird sensation in my body. It's like a slight panic, and you have to realize, 'Oh yeah, we're making a movie.'"

"[Costume designer] Mari-An Ceo and I had a ton of discussions about exactly what The Fisherman would look like today," Robinson says. "We had the original costume pulled from storage and dissected how we could update the look. I knew from the jump I wanted to create a new slicker and hook. I wanted it to feel scary, but also real. What would a fisherman wear today? What are those slickers like? We did a ton of research, looked at so many fabric swatches, did a bunch of different aging tests on the slicker. It was incredibly fun."

As for the havoc he wreaks with that hook, Robinson and her team didn't pull back. *I Still Know* famously ramped up the violence from the first film, and "I think we might even go further than *I Still Know*," Robinson muses. "It was important to me to do as much practically as humanly possible. We had a lot of blood meetings. Odd Studios did an amazing job with the gore – including creating some absolutely out-of-this-world dummy bodies that people continue to think are real when they watch the film."

CHASE SUI WONDERS RETURNS TO THE GENRE AFTER A MEMORABLE TURN IN *BODIES BODIES BODIES*.

Escalating was the name of the game. "Audiences are really smart," Lansky says. "Because we're exposed to so much more media now, we are a lot savvier and we see things coming, and we have been conditioned to expect certain things. So… the most fun thing you can do for viewers at this moment in history is to keep them on their toes, and surprise them, and try and imagine what their expectations are going to be, and do something different, and unexpected, and surprising."

Lansky is quick to honor the films he watched as a kid that helped inspire his contributions here: "I loved *Cruel Intentions*. I loved *Wild Things*. I loved *Scream*, of course. Going back a little earlier, I loved *Basic Instinct*, anything Verhoeven. I love a femme fatale; I love a twisty-turny murder plot." He also counts Lynch and Hitchcock among the masters who made him, but the one movie that he and Robinson used as a guiding light for *I Know What You Did Last Summer*? *Jaws*.

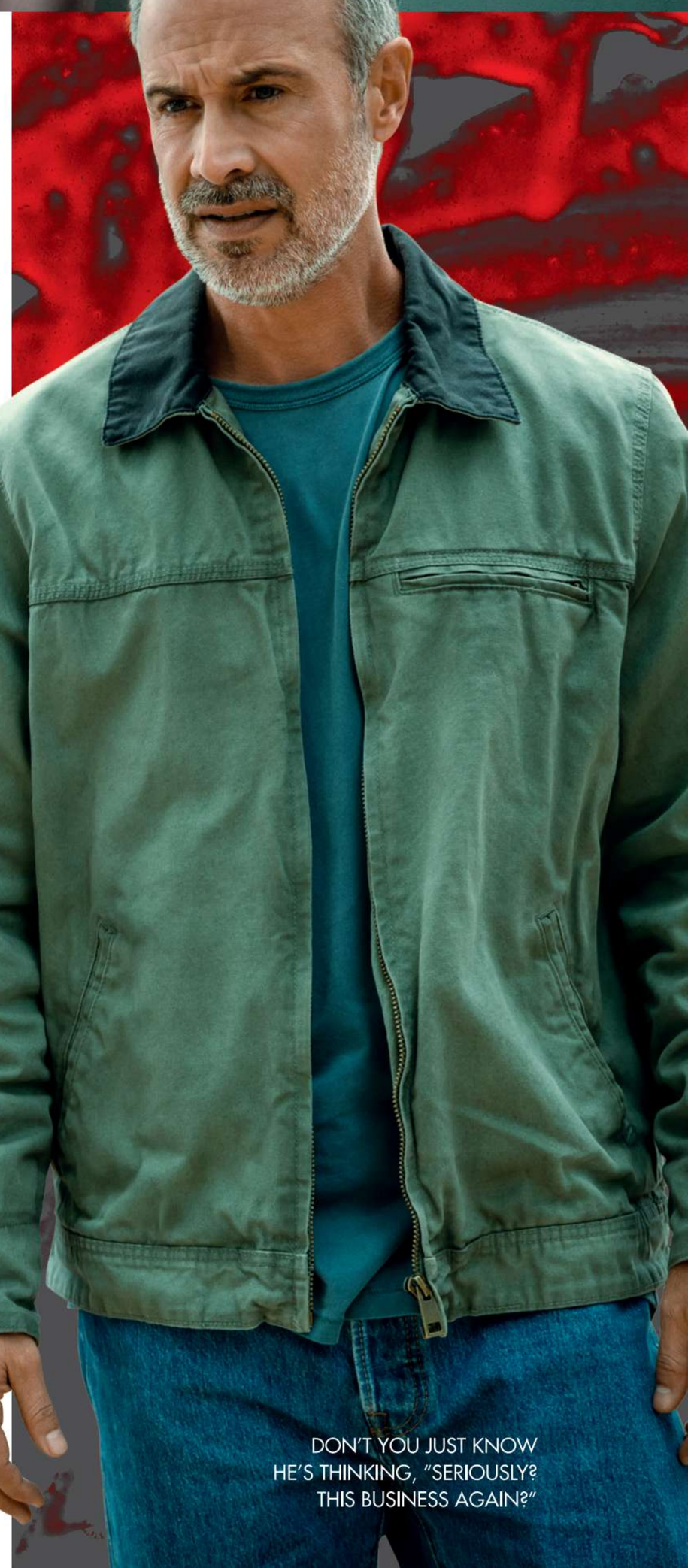
"It's so crowd-pleasing, and so fun, and action-packed, but also feels sort of elevated and artistic in its way. It doesn't feel disposable; it doesn't feel like a product. It really feels like it is both a capital-M Movie and a capital-F Film."

Robinson echoes the Movieness of this movie, quoting a viral moment from the already-legendary *Don't Worry Darling* press tour. "In the words of Harry Styles, 'My favorite thing about this movie is it feels like a movie. It feels like a real go-to-the-theater-movie.' I want everyone to grab all their friends, buckle the fuck up, and enjoy the wild ride."

More than the thrills or the gore or the "legacy sequel" of it all, however, what matters most in 2025's *I Know What You Did Last Summer* is the same thing that worked about 1997's *I Know What You Did Last Summer*: the characters, and the friendship they share.

"That was maybe the most fun part of the whole process, working with Jenn to find these characters' voices, and to figure out who they are as they're walking through this new nightmare," Lansky says.

"You really care about them and believe in their friendship," Robinson says of the new cast. "My favorite scenes in the film are ones where they're all on screen together. I'm going to make you fall in love with everyone in this movie, and then I'm going to take them from you, one by one."



LOVE'S HORROR LOVES

BY JENNIFER LOVE HEWITT

Horror is such great wish-fulfillment and fun. You know what you're setting yourself up for, and you're going there on purpose, and it gets your heart going. It's a really fun genre and world to be in – and it's obviously been very good to me, and I'm appreciative of that.

But here's the thing: I am terrified of horror movies. That's the truth. I've only seen half of *Halloween* because it scared me so badly. Even though I love Jamie Lee Curtis, I said, "I'm out. I cannot do this."

Still, in prep for the first *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, because I was 18 and had never seen a horror movie at that point, I did watch a few to prepare. I believe the first horror movie I saw was *Pet Sematary*. Freddie Prinze Jr. told me to watch that one, I think, or maybe Ryan Phillippe. And that's a rough place to start, let me tell you! And then I watched *The Omen*, which was intense. Jim Gillespie, the director, told me to watch *The Omen* – they all wanted to help me with the curriculum.

But it was actually my mother who told me to watch my favorite of all of them, *The Shining*. She said, "Oh, you should check out *The Shining*, because it's scary and fun," and I loved it.

And my first time watching *I Know What You Did Last Summer* and *I Still Know What You Did Last Summer* all the way through? That was six months ago with my children.

And I loved them! I obviously knew what was going to be happening in the movies, and I had seen most of them in clips here and there. But even at the premieres, I felt like, "I don't want to be a part of this. Where's the popcorn?" So, it was really a trip to sit with my children and watch them. It was so fun, and they're really good!

And my kids loved them. My daughter looks so much like a young Julie James, so that was wild. And my son said, "Maybe I should be The Fisherman for Halloween?" At first I thought, "Don't you dare," because I'm still not a Fisherman fan. But it would be pretty good, right? I could be Julie James. It would be so easy. 💀

THE PRINZE OF HORROR

BY FREDDIE PRINZE JR.

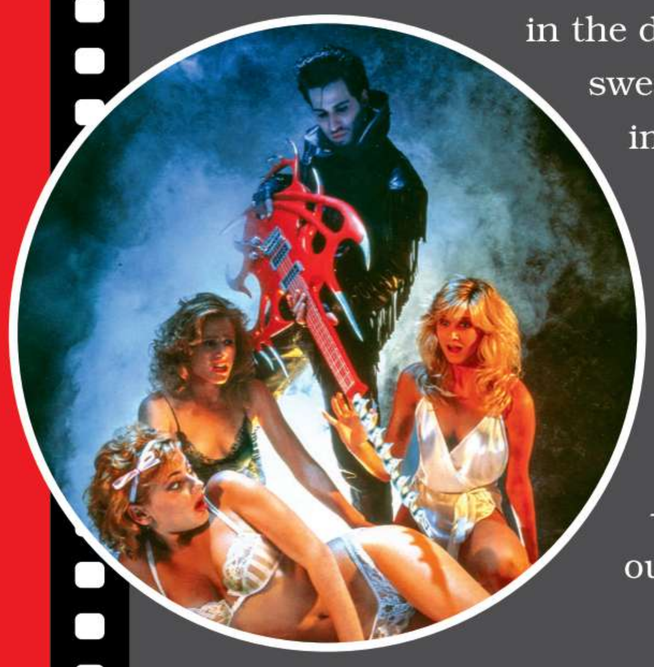
I do a podcast called *That Was Pretty Scary* with my co-host Jon Lee Brody, and all we talk about are our favorite horror movies, which is basically *every* horror movie. I've always loved FANGORIA, ever since I was a kid. But there are a few movies that have always stood out to me.

Suspiria has always been one of my favorites. I love giallo and Italian cinema in general. I love the, "Let's put it all on the line and see what happens" sort of mentality necessary to make these movies. And the music in them is so good – *Suspiria*'s score is beautiful, and the *Deep Red* soundtrack is still one of my favorite soundtracks to this day.

I also love *Slumber Party Massacre II*. It has a musical sequence at the end, where it becomes a completely different movie. I think the Driller Killer is awesome. I love that movie; it's hysterical to me.

Jaws is probably on a lot of people's lists, but it's on mine because I didn't know it was going to be a horror movie going in. And it made me scared to even get in a swimming pool as a third grader because I thought, "Well, what if a shark came through the drain?" I was scared to swim alone, so it really had a big impact on me.

And then, of course, the very first *Alien*, because I saw it at a young age and I had to walk home in the dark. And that alien, I could swear to God in my nine-year-old imagination, it was in the trees. It was really windy in New Mexico, and I could hear it jumping from tree to tree, and I ran faster than I've ever run in my life, and I made it to my house and slammed the door – as if that would keep the alien out. As if anything would. 💀



ARLENE (NICKY GUADAGNI) DISCOVERS AN UNPLEASANT DENTAL COMPONENT TO BEING REVIVED.

HERE COMES THE PAIN

BY RON MCKENZIE

IMAGE COMICS' CULT SERIES GETS THE LIVE ACTION TREATMENT THANKS TO SYFY'S NEW SHOW.

Undead uprisings are a far from uncommon occurrence in horror, whatever the medium. Simply swing a stick and you'll hit a zombie apocalypse (though the quality is often left to be debated). So when Tim Seeley and Mike Norton released *Revival* through Image Comics in 2012, they approached the subgenre with a fresh take on a tried-and-true formula: in a small farming district in Wisconsin, the recently deceased rise from their graves, looking and acting the same as they did before death, with no idea how or why it happened. Dubbed Revival Day, the phenomenon leaves everyone with the same questions: How did this happen, and what's coming next? The series ran forty-seven issues till 2017, with many fans eager to see it adapted for either film or television. Collaborators Aaron B. Koontz (producer) and Luke Boyce (writer/director) clearly thought so, too, when they took on the task of shepherding its growth into a new TV series for SYFY.

THIS PAGE, PRODUCER AARON B. KOONTZ (ABOVE RIGHT) AND SOME OF *REVIVAL*'S REVIVERS.

Revival stars Melanie Scrofano (*Letterkenny*, *Wynonna Earp*) as Deputy Dana Cypress, Romy Weltman (*Terror Train*) as younger sibling and superhuman reviver Em, and David James Elliott (*JAG*) as town sheriff and Cypress patriarch Wayne. Rounding out the cast: Steven Ogg is the show's antagonist, amateur demonologist and general bad seed Blaine Abel, with Andy McQueen and Lara Jean Chorostecki featured in the show's supporting cast of characters. The central plotline – Em and Dana's investigation of Em's murder and subsequent return – is the question at this story's core, with the bigger mystery of the revival event itself woven into those threads.

The road to *Revival* was a slow and steady one for Boyce, starting with his friendship with the comic's co-creator, Tim Seely. "We had been developing *Revival* as a feature for many years," he says. "I met Tim about nine or so years ago and we started talking about it… I was a huge fan of the comic."

Seeley and Boyce soon became collaborators, co-writing 2022's indie horror/comedy, *Revealer*. "We worked in the indie feature space and we felt comfortable doing that, just going low budget, but the scope of *Revival* is very big, and it was tough to make that work in a feature space." It all started coming together when Boyce looped in Koontz, a producer on *Revealer*.

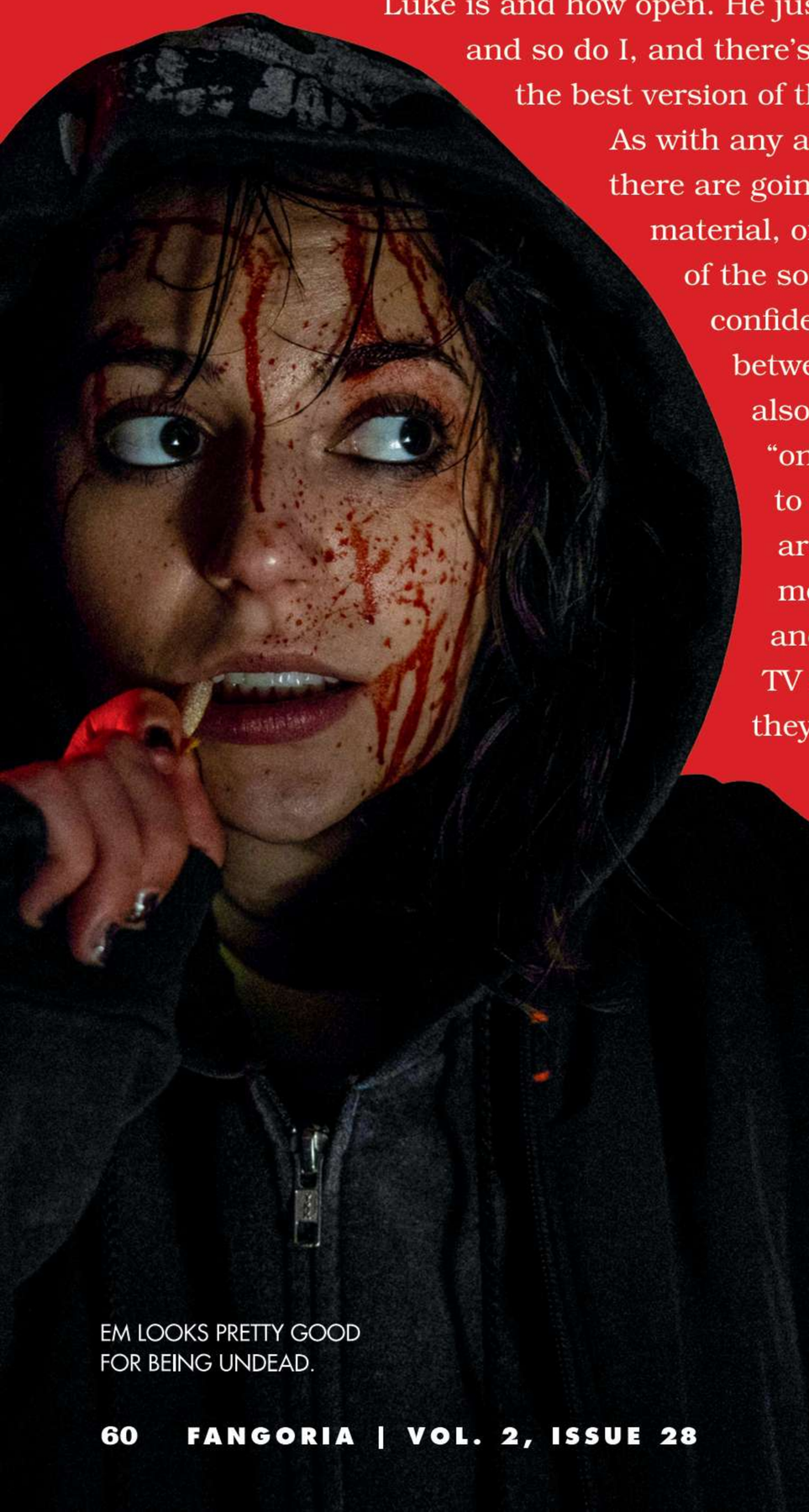
"When Aaron came on board after *Revealer*, we started talking about it creatively and we were still sort of playing with different ideas. He really pushed for the idea of making it a TV show, and we started talking about different versions of what that would look like and how we might pitch that. It became pretty clear, once we really started digging, how much we could do with it as a TV show to adapt it."

Kootz was an immediate convert after reading the first issue. "Oh my God, I was hooked. Like, 'This is the pilot.' There's a feeling that you have when you read that first issue of the comic, and we were like, 'There's a way we can

ARLENE WIELDS A SCYTHE AT MARTHA "EM" CYPRESS (ROMY WELTMAN).

recreate that feeling,' because I had to keep reading the comic after that. I had to keep reading. There was so much there, I was so curious."

Koontz felt instant synchronicity with Boyce in this new partnership as they began developing the property for television. "I realized just how collaborative Luke is and how open. He just wants to make the best thing and so do I, and there's no ego to 'Okay, how do we make the best version of this?'"



EM LOOKS PRETTY GOOD FOR BEING UNDEAD.

As with any adaptation of another medium, there are going to be changes to the source material, often at the risk of ruffling feathers of the source material's devotees. Boyce is confident they've struck the right balance between fidelity and flexibility, while also understanding that it wasn't a "one-size-fits-all" scenario. "You have to take the mediums for what they are, and a comic is a very specific medium. Some people look at comics and think, 'Well, they're the same as a TV show because they're serialized, but they're so different in terms of time, the way time works in comics, that it's actually hard to do an extended murder mystery in a comic. That's one thing the comic doesn't do as much that we could afford to because television lends itself so well to murder mysteries. We've got to push the hook for this thing, that it's a murder mystery and the person who is murdered is still alive. And that's amazing, right? So we knew right away, we've got to work with that. Not that we want to be different from the comic, but what are the opportunities that the comic couldn't do that we can do here? And that was a big starting point for adaptation."

Koontz adds, "It's become one hell of a journey on *Revival* because you have such a big thing. There's so much that can be done. It's big ideas, tons of characters, tons of locations and a very, very small budget. So it was like, 'How do we hit the best version of this? What are the key things to hit and how can you really make these moments stand out? Can we be quicker and more efficient in these moments?'"

Boyce adds, "The way we structured Season One is there are a few central mysteries: What is this creature in the woods? What caused Revival Day? Who murdered Em? Those are the three central mysteries and, with the comic, everything culminates and they're all answered together." He explains that on the series, they intend to answer the big questions on their own time, rather than all at once. "It's a fun way to change the order of things and still allow us to adapt" with some flexibility.

While the story is a melancholy one framed by loss and grief, don't think the show is going to skimp on

the inevitable undead-related violence. There's blood, mayhem – even a creature or two. With Koontz being a very vocal advocate, *Revival* is relying on practical effects for the majority, if not all, of the series. "We brought in Steven Kostanski [*Psycho Goreman*, *Frankie Freako*, *In a Violent Nature*] and his team… We wanted to lean into it. We weren't going to pull punches."

This includes the physical creation of the series' "passengers," ethereal creatures in the woods tied directly into the revival event. Koontz gets animated when discussing the old-school approach. "We literally lit a dude on fire in the pilot! We're not CGI-ing this stuff. There's tons of practical effects that get crazier as the season goes on. We wanted to lean into things that mattered to me. I was a FANGORIA reader my entire life, and that was what I grew up with."

The relationship between Dana and Em is the emotional hook that everything else needs to hang on, and there's nothing but praise for Scrofano and Weltman from the show's creators. "It starts with Melanie," Koontz says, "who we had seen on *Letterkenny*. People knew her from *Wynonna Earp*. I saw her in *Ready or Not*. She has such range; there are so many different sides to her. What we needed with Dana was someone who was captivating, who's funny and also someone you believed could kick down the door if you needed them to. That was something where Melanie checked every single box… Melanie was right there at the top the entire time. I think her fans, especially from *Wynonna Earp*, are going to like it."

Romy Weltman carries the weight and mystery of Em's story on her shoulders, a task that Koontz knows she's more than capable of handling. "Goodness, she's probably the biggest trooper on the entire show, willing to do anything and everything and, God, she just goes there. We have put her through the wringer, both as an actor and a character. I'm very excited for the world to discover because, even in the pilot, you don't really realize how this is really Em's journey, and it goes to some crazy places." Koontz compares her progression to another complicated television protagonist: "The Walter White that you first meet and the Walter White that he becomes at the end of *Breaking Bad* is so fun. So, how can we set something up in a similar way with Em and hint at things under the surface and see where that goes?"

The heart of the story, amidst all the mystery and horror, is a family in pain, and how they move forward in the face of both personal tragedy and world-shattering apocalyptic events. "Will the Cypress family heal?" Boyce asks. "One of my favorite lines – it was in our Bible from the beginning – is in episode three where Em says, 'I had to die to feel alive.' And I think there's something really great about second chances and the understanding of what that is, because this isn't a 'zombie story.'… It's not about survival. It's not about death. It's about life. It's about understanding what these opportunities are and reframing all that's going on in our world and our lives."

Revival is now streaming on SYFY (Crave in Canada). 💀

THAT'S NOT A SET MEDIC WITH NEOSPORIN; MAKEUP FX ARTIST KARLEE MORSE (RIGHT) PUTS THE GOOPY FINAL TOUCH ON ARLENE'S SCALPED SCALP.

REVIVAL IS A MURDER MYSTERY INVESTIGATED BY ITS OWN VICTIM. NOW THAT'S INCENTIVE, FOLKS.

PHOTOS BY MATHIEU SAVIDANT, COURTESY OF SYFY AND PAPER STREET PICTURES

MAULIN- THE FAMILY: THE OTHER

BY SEAN ABLEY

Writer/director Paul Etheredge makes his long-awaited comeback with this gory familial horror.

ANYONE ELSE GETTING *THE BROOD* VIBES HERE?

In 2004, writer/director Paul Etheredge made a big, gory splash in the horror world with *Hellbent*, a gay slasher set in West Hollywood during the Halloween Festival. Twenty years later, Etheredge is back with *The Other*, a bloody domestic thriller about a couple grappling with two new additions to their family: a foster child and an evil presence that may or may not have tagged along for the ride. In the film, Kathelia (Avangeline Friedlander), a mixed-race, orphaned Black girl with a troubled past, is adopted by Robin (Olivia Macklin) and Daniel (Dylan McTee), a white couple who struggle with infertility. Mute from past trauma and unable to communicate with her new foster parents, Kathelia is almost immediately the center of violent, paranormal unrest in the home.

LIZZIE (SHAWNEE SMITH) MEANS WELL, BUT KATHELIA (AVANGELINE FRIEDLANDER) HAS A PROBLEM NO NEIGHBOR CAN FIX.

Except for the short form series *Buried Alive* for FEARnet and the Zoe Bell vehicle *Angel of Death*, Etheredge has spent the bulk of his time after *Hellbent* working as a production designer and art director. So what brought him back to the director chair for the fourth time? Much like Wes Craven's iconic films were inspired by his own nightmares, Etheredge's creative spark was manifest in the form of a dream. "On my honeymoon, I had a nightmare about having a child that was ruining my new life," he recalls. "There was blood and all of that… And because it was a nightmare, it always felt so visceral to me. That was back in the '90s. That was my first marriage," chuckles Etheredge.

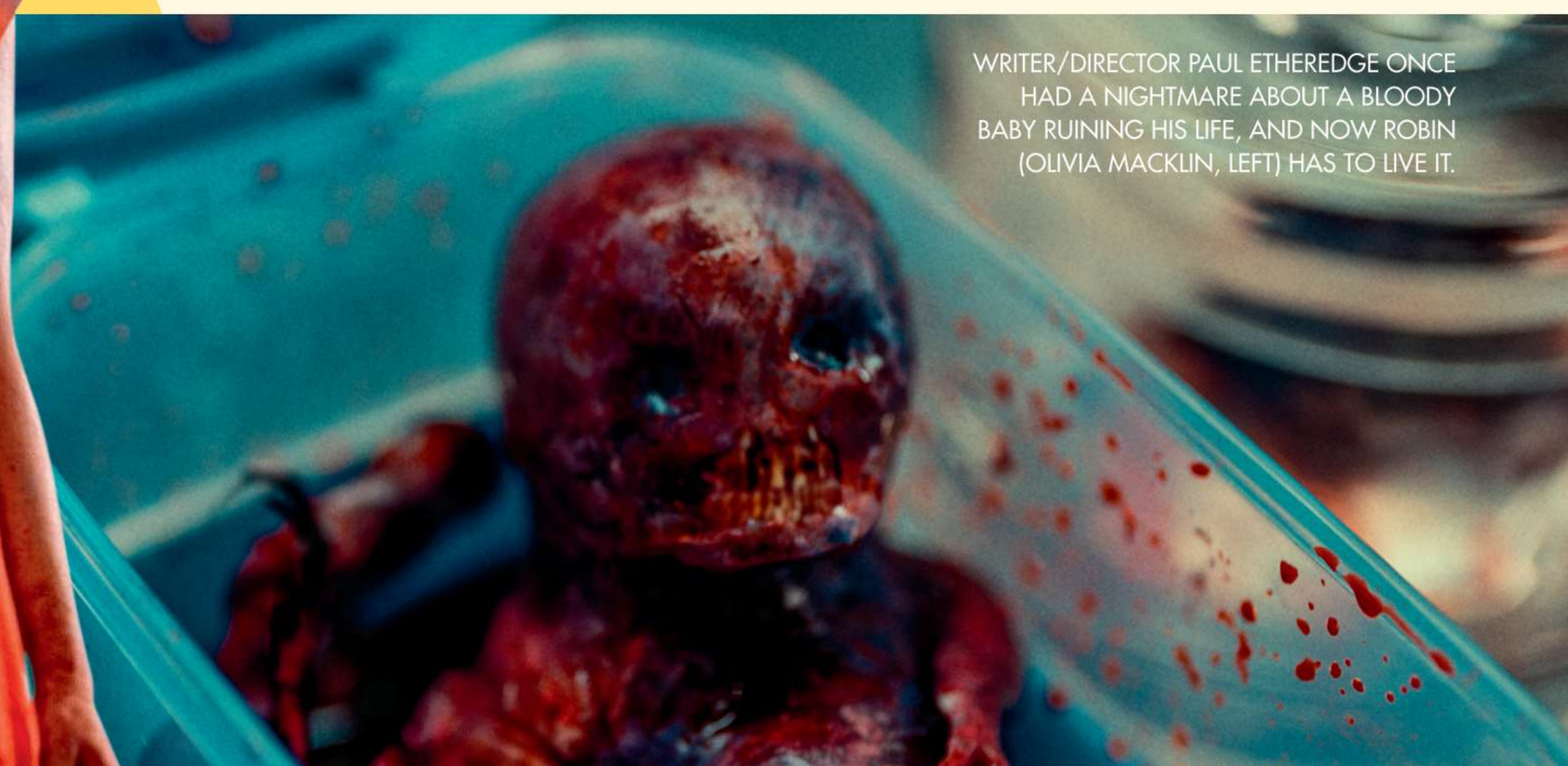
Despite the vivid birth of the original idea, Etheredge didn't tackle the script until over a decade later. "I held onto it for a long time until after my mom died," he explains. "I felt like I needed her death in order to open up my comfort in writing about this because there's a lot of tension between the mother and the kid [in the script]. It's somewhat autobiographical."

Working alongside Etheredge is his good friend Jeffrey Reddick, creator of the *Final Destination* franchise. Although well-established as a screenwriter, Reddick has spent the last decade slowly amassing an impressive list of producing credits along with his writing gigs. "For me, it's about just surviving in the business… [And] I wanted to have more control over my work," he explains. "But I've also read a lot of scripts that are really good that people aren't making. [When] I come across a script I love, there's only so much I can do. But I do realize that my brand – I hate saying that word – has value in the horror space, and so I've helped friends produce their stuff."

Reddick and Etheredge last worked together in the writers room for Here TV's gay, softcore, horror-lite guilty pleasure soap opera, *Dante's Cove*, back in 2007. Turns out, Etheredge's latest screenplay was one of those scripts Reddick loved. "I really thought it was great. So I was like, 'Oh, yeah, I'll definitely produce this.'"

Etheredge decamped from Los Angeles to Austin during the pandemic, so the decision was made to shoot in his home state of Texas to take advantage of lower production costs and local boy support. The search for a producer who understood the Lone Star film scene began with director Chelsea Stardust (*Satanic Panic* and the upcoming anthology *Grind*). "I called up Chelsea and said, 'Hey, I'm trying to shoot a horror film in Dallas, and you've done that. Who should I speak to?'" explains Etheredge. "Right off the bat she said, 'Lisa Norman.'"

"She's a treasure!" exclaims Norman of Stardust. "Jeffrey and Paul originally reached out to me back in August of 2021… with the script and funding to produce the film at a very low budget," recalls Norman. Much like Reddick, Norman was wooed by Etheredge's screenplay and signed on to be part of the production team. But, as do so many films in pre-production, the



WRITER/DIRECTOR PAUL ETHEREDGE ONCE HAD A NIGHTMARE ABOUT A BLOODY BABY RUINING HIS LIFE, AND NOW ROBIN (OLIVIA MACKLIN, LEFT) HAS TO LIVE IT.

IN *THE OTHER*, ROBIN'S REALLY GOING THROUGH IT…

The Other situation fell apart. In the interim, Norman joined Camp Lucky, a Dallas-based production company known at the time for their commercial and short form work. "I pitched this project to my team here, and they absolutely fell in love with the script," explains Norman. And just like that, *The Other* became Camp Lucky's inaugural feature-length production.

As he regales Fango with stories about the shoot, Etheredge confesses his greatest apprehension was working with a child actor. "Honestly, I was so scared. I watched *Close Encounters*, and I read up on people who worked with children – how did they do it?"

Considering what Kathelia goes through in the film (look up "trepanation" for an idea of just one of the Fango-worthy gore setpieces to befall the character), concern for Friedlander was probably warranted. However, the young actress came to the project with an extensive resume of acting credits despite being only nine years old at the time of the shoot. According to Etheredge, she handled everything from a sledgehammer blow to possessed parental rage like a pro.

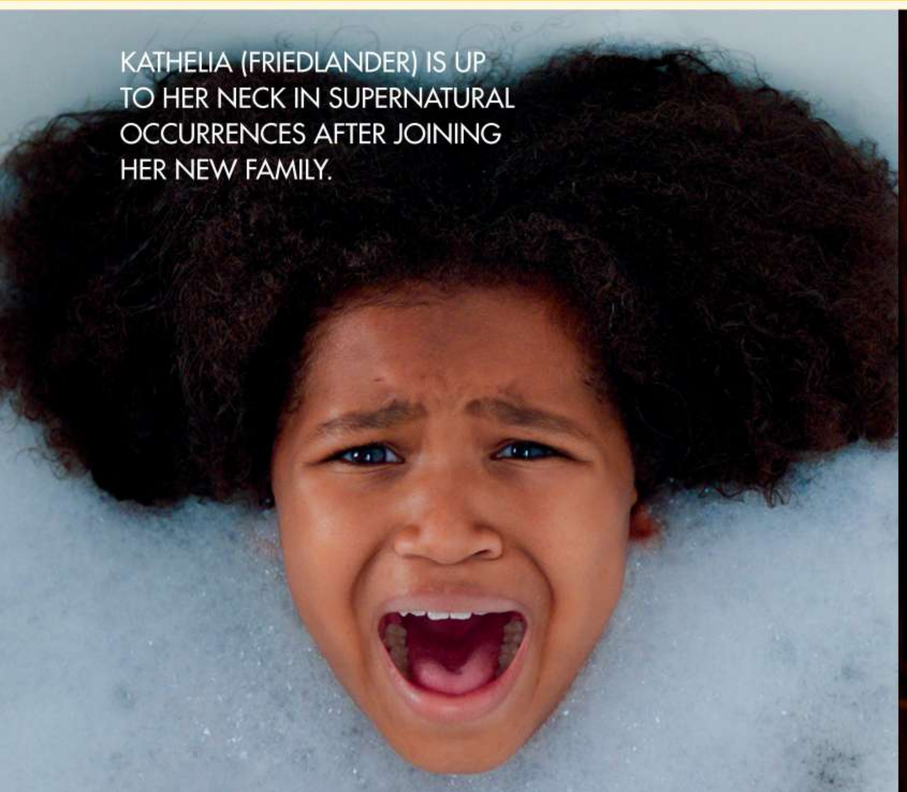
"She's so good. I've heard about this for child actors… that they can completely put themselves into the moment suddenly and then drop out of it. And that's what she could do."

Also a dream was working with horror royalty Shawnee Smith (*Saw* franchise), who plays Lizzie, mom to Fiona (Lily D. Moore), Kathelia's psychic friend. "Oh, my God, how lucky am I?" enthuses Etheredge. "She actually auditioned for the film because of a mistake," he reveals. A snafu at Smith's agency resulted in a request for the actor to read for the role. "And when her tape came in, I'm just like, 'Holy shit!'" laughs Etheredge. Smith plays against type as a tatted-up artist and loving single mom who, frankly, is a bit of a mess. "She was just a joy. She really was clever, brought in her own ideas on the character, just kept it fresh. I was really, really grateful for that."

Unfortunately, another cast member was less than helpful during their on-set collaboration, and after a week of shooting, creative differences dictated a change be made. "There was a moment of clarity that I will

ETHEREDGE'S SCRIPT IS PACKED WITH FANGO-APPROVED CONTENT LIKE KNIFE FIGHTS, DOLL DISMEMBERMENT, A KILLER SWIMMING POOL, MONSTER PREGNANCIES, MONSTER MISCARRIAGES, GNARLED CREATURES, DIY BRAIN SURGERY, AND NOT ONE BUT TWO SLEDGEHAMMER ATTACKS.

…AND SHE'S BRINGING DANIEL (DYLAN MCTEE) WITH HER.



KATHELIA (FRIEDLANDER) IS UP TO HER NECK IN SUPERNATURAL OCCURRENCES AFTER JOINING HER NEW FAMILY.

SEEMS UNLIKELY THIS IS WHAT DANIEL SIGNED UP FOR.

"A GOOFY RUBBER MONSTER HAS." - PAUL ETHEREDGE

"CGI JUST CAN'T MATCH THE 'LIFE'

never forget when I realized that there was no way we could continue with that actor," recalls Norman, noting that replacing the performer added a week to the shooting schedule. "We were on set, the crew was hanging around," remembers Etheredge. "I was looking at auditions during the morning, and choosing an actor and flying him in for the following day."

Having produced several low-budget genre flicks, Reddick was particularly grateful for the production's flexibility. "We were very fortunate that Camp Lucky stepped up to the plate," he explains of the added week, "because a lot of times on a lower budget film [you don't] have the time. You just have to deal with it."

"It was a terrifying call to have to make," Norman adds. But when she finally broke the news to the company, "there was a collective sigh of relief and several crew members thanked me privately, so I knew it was the right decision."

Thankfully, any other terrible events connected to the film are constrained to Etheredge's script, which is packed with Fango-approved content like knife fights, doll dismemberment, a killer swimming pool, monster pregnancies, monster miscarriages, gnarled creatures, DIY brain surgery, and not one but two sledgehammer attacks.

When asked about his preferred delivery mechanism for the wet stuff, Etheredge turns effusive.

"I love practical effects – looooooove," gushes Etheredge. "I know horror directors say this a lot, but it's true: CGI just can't match the 'life' a goofy rubber monster has." Etheredge pushed for practical effects and, working alongside special creature designer Jared Krichevsky and key makeup artist Sarah Brill, created many of the gags and gremlins himself. "I can't just watch the other kids play – I want my hands bloody, too!"

While *The Other* is a gory good time, propping up all those gruesome goings-on are important real-life social issues the film explores through the fantastical lens of horror. "Complicated family dynamics, racial tension, motherhood, anti-neurodivergent bias, chosen family…" Norman lists when asked what themes she feels will resonate with audiences. As for her personal bullseye, "I think, for me, it's the strong and complicated female characters," she offers. "It was surprising at first that a man could write so many varied and sincere female voices, but then I met the army of women and girls that make up Paul's family."

Reddick agrees with Norman, but has his own very personal perspective on the script, as well. "I know how hard it is for children of color to be adopted. And here you have a child who has been through some trauma where she can't even speak… It's already strange enough bringing a child into your home… and you've also got this cultural undertone that you're adopting a child of a different race," he points out. "So things that can be misread or differences that are just part of a normal experience might be exacerbated by this. I found that undercurrent to be as interesting."

Now that all these thematic ingredients have been thoroughly mixed with the ghosts and the grue, and *The Other* is ready for general consumption, Etheredge looks back while contemplating the future. "*Hellbent*, my first feature, is twenty years old this year. *Angel of Death*, my most recent, turns sixteen. In this business, that's a long-ass time to be away from the director chair," he says. Etheredge expresses how grateful he is to be back at it again and is eager for more. "For me, nothing feels more like home than directing. A nightmarish, punishing, soul-rending, anxiety-filled home, but still home. I can't wait to do it again. I have a head full of fucked-up horror to share!" 💀

AS *THE OTHER*'S RESIDENT PSYCHIC, FIONA TRIES TO WARN THIS FAMILY, BUT THEY'RE NOT LISTENING.

PHOTOS BY ELIANA PIRES, COURTESY OF CAMP LUCKY STUDIOS

DESCENDING INTO —

BY ANGEL MELANSON

Peter Cilella's **DESCENDENT** examines fatherhood anxiety through an extraterrestrial lens.

At a secluded location in Southern California, poor cell reception and large buildings scattered across a sprawling property make it feel as though we are miles away from civilization. In reality, we're in Sun Valley, just northeast of the Burbank airport. From the outside, the main building looks a bit like a mansion. Inside, she contains many secrets, which we'll explore later. For now, producers David Lawson Jr. and Caleb Ward come out to welcome me to the set as we convene on the porch while a scene is being shot inside. "I'm not used to being interviewed," Lawson admits. "It's usually Justin and Aaron." He's referring to the filmmaking duo (and his frequent collaborators) Justin Benson and Aaron Moorhead, who are two of the producers on *Descendent*.

Descendent is an alien abduction movie very much rooted in the fears of a new father. Fitting, since writer/director Peter Cilella is making his feature debut soon after becoming a first-time father himself. In fact, it's a story largely brought to life by new dads. When Cilella first came to Lawson with the idea in the summer of 2020, Lawson and his wife were expecting their first child. The concept started out as the protagonist experiencing tremendous anxiety about the upcoming birth of his child. Cilella knew he wanted to explore that idea, but he didn't want to write a straight-up drama. Instead, he chose to frame that story within the genre space. "I love genre movies because you're able to deal with subject matter and entertain people. I mean, *Aliens* is a movie about Ripley's second chance at motherhood."

After roughly a year-long delay in production, Ward notes, "One hundred percent of the people that were ready to go a year ago are here today." That includes *Descendent* star Ross Marquand. Lawson shares that the delay was actually beneficial in the long run, as it gave *The Walking Dead* actor a year to sit with the project rather than jumping right into it fresh off the eleven-season series. Marquand joins us on the porch after wrapping up the scene inside. Today sounds like a breeze in comparison to what he endured the day before. He fills me in: "Yesterday was pretty gnarly. We went to the studio space and I was lying half naked on a metal gurney while an alien was probing my nasal cavities and temples. Typical Tuesday for me. But it was just the webbing and the goo that they have us in, it just felt very real, even though I've never been abducted – to my knowledge."

As we make our way inside for the next scene, the mysteries of this giant compound are revealed room by room. Once inside the doors, sets unfold one after the other, and every few feet, I find myself in a new location entirely. At first, it feels as though we're walking through someone's home, but after passing through what feels like a bar and restaurant, we arrive in a hospital hallway.

I take a seat in video village and watch a medical procedure obscured by a thin curtain. The shadowy figures draped in scrubs wield various sharp medical instruments and cut an ominous silhouette. Marquand is in the foreground, drenched in an eerie green glow, the surgical shadow puppet theater playing out just beyond him. This team works fast; after the first take, I can hear director Peter Cilella say something along the lines of, "That was close. Pretty fucking perfect." After two additional takes for safety, they've got it.

There are plenty of horror movies that deal with the fears and anxieties that come with being a parent, but more often than not, they tend to focus explicitly on mothers. It's rare we get a peek into a dad's mental health when tackling parenthood for the first time. Mother horror gives us the fear of carrying and growing a living entity in your body, and meeting the expectations of nurturing. But what about modern fathers who are really tuned in and approach their relationships as true partnerships? The fears and anxieties that come with being able to nurture but also provide, and grappling with those concepts of masculinity and fatherhood from the previous generation.

"Because Pete and I are almost the same age, our fathers' version of fatherhood is drastically different than what I imagined my version to be and what Pete's was," Lawson shares. "A

THIS PAGE AND FACING: NEW FATHER SEAN (ROSS MARQUAND) IS MIRED IN NEW FATHERHOOD RESPONSIBILITIES.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RLJE FILMS

DESCENDENT IS DELIVERING ON THE SCI-FI AND HORROR FRONTS.

lot of this story stems from that idea of what it means to be a man and a partner, which has changed for the better, in my opinion. There wasn't a day in my daughter's life that I missed until she was 17 months old, which was great. I raced home last night so that I could put her to bed."

Marquand's on-screen partner is played by Sarah Bolger, who still has a prosthetic pregnancy belly strapped to her torso as she takes a seat across from me. Marquand explains all the various things their characters Sean and Andrea are freaking out about: money, showing up for their unborn daughter, all the usual concerns. "But I think Sean really is freaking out way more than Andrea," says Bolger. "He's worried on several levels that he's not going to be a good provider financially, emotionally, you name it. And I think that that fear has really entered into a state of psychosis for him."

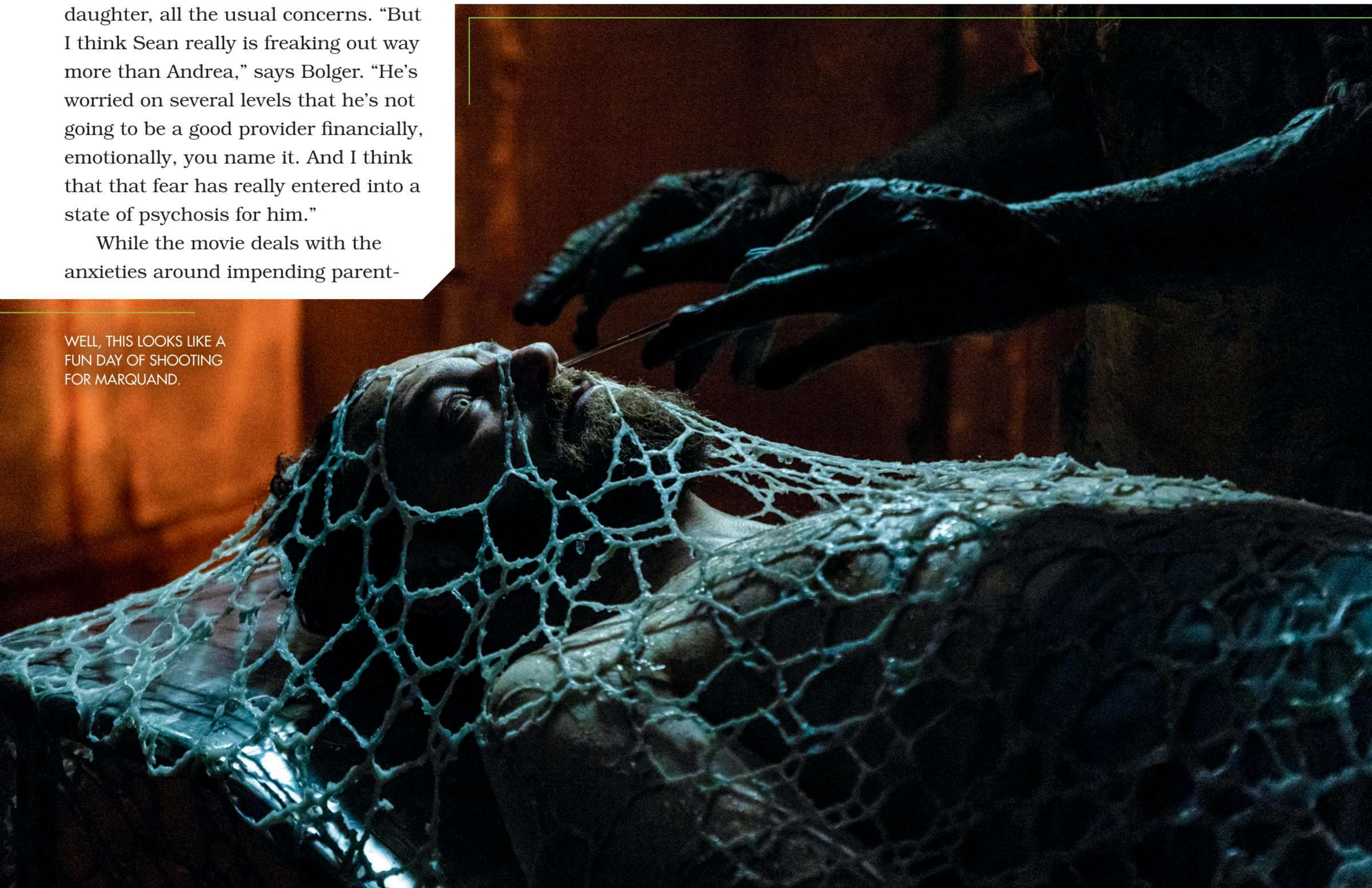
While the movie deals with the anxieties around impending parent-hood, Bolger emphasizes, "In this movie, it's not so much doom that's lurking, it's more like the weight of the future is lurking. This future is imminent, whether or not we as people are ready for it."

Of course, what the future brings is change. One way or another. "I don't think any of us know unless you have a kid what that does to you or how that changes you," Bolger explains. "But becoming a parent within the frame of this film, you see how it changes my character, Andrea. I'll never be the same, but that's for the best."

Just speaking of general humanity, that's a beautiful thing. We're all meant to change, not necessarily by having children, but we're all meant to go through some sort of metamorphosis. In this, Ross and I go through very different ones."

While there are no visible extra-terrestrials on set this afternoon, the creatures were created by Russell FX, so we know they'll be something to marvel at. Cilella shares that wasn't always the plan. The original concept involved using PPE and clever lighting and angles to mostly obscure the entities. As they began to test that out, they realized that wasn't going to fly. "We knew we were going to be really featuring the alien, so the glimpses needed to look good. They needed to look scary." Enter, Russell FX, the folks behind 2022's *Hellraiser*. "We were really fortunate," Cilella adds.

The overall verdict is that "it is the hardest but most gratifying thing," Cilella says about his experience as a first-time director, before smiling and adding, "It is as challenging as I expected, but it's actually more rewarding than I anticipated." Not unlike being a first-time father, I'd imagine.



WELL, THIS LOOKS LIKE A FUN DAY OF SHOOTING FOR MARQUAND.

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THE HIP CRYPT OF DR. SARCOFIGUY

AND HIS SPOOKY MOVIES

BY MICHAEL VARRATI

An ode to the iconic horror host created by John Dimes.

ILLUSTRATION BY BRENDAN HALEY

Since the beginning, John Dimes has had a thing about bad audiences.

Reflecting on a childhood spent watching *The Dean Martin Celebrity Roast* and the likes of Charlie Callas and Foster Brooks, Dimes recalls a particular incident where, upon seeing Brooks doing a drunken schtick, he expressed to his father a desire to follow in the performer's footsteps.

"I remember my dad said, '…you don't want to do that! That man is talking backwards!'" Dimes shares. "I tried to tell him that the guy wasn't drunk; he was a comedian. I knew in that moment that discussing my creative life was a doomed affair."

Whether the incident with his dad was Dimes' first encounter with the disconnect between art and audience perception is immaterial, but it does highlight an ongoing theme of the multi-faceted entertainer's career: Just because something isn't for everyone, it doesn't mean that it's not for *someone*.

These days, Dimes is perhaps most widely known for the creation, curation and portrayal of his horror host character Dr. Sarcofiguy, who has made part and parcel out of defending cinema that many would otherwise deem as schlock. However, for the layperson who may be slightly confused about how one goes from a Foster Brooks-emulating hopeful to a creature feature emcee, rest assured that the trajectory is clearer than one might think.

Already a devotee of comedy, Dimes says that everything changed when he saw 1973's *Frankenstein: The True Story*.

"It was the first movie that scared the crap out of me," he says. "At some point, my mom, who had a fantastic sense of humor, was able to get me to see absurdity."

As it turns out, Dimes' mother was able to make him turn the leaf when she got him to laugh at "the cheesiness" of the prop the film used as the decapitated head of ingenue Jane Seymour.

THE (SARCOFI)GUY HIMSELF, ON A PANEL WITH COUNT GORE DE VOL.

"THERE ARE NO BAD MOVIES, ONLY BAD AUDIENCES."

- John Dimes

"Finding the comedy, finding the humor really helped me enjoy horror."

From that point forward, the intermingling of the funny and the frightening became tantamount for the emerging performer, although it would take some years before Sarcofiguy would fully manifest.

Coming up through the ranks of stand-up comedy, Dimes worked alongside the likes of Patton Oswalt, Wanda Sykes, and Dave Chappelle. Black, gay, and with an unapologetic sense of self, Dimes nonetheless did not want his comedy to be solely defined by identity politics, and sought material that allowed him to explore and express his other, more focused passions.

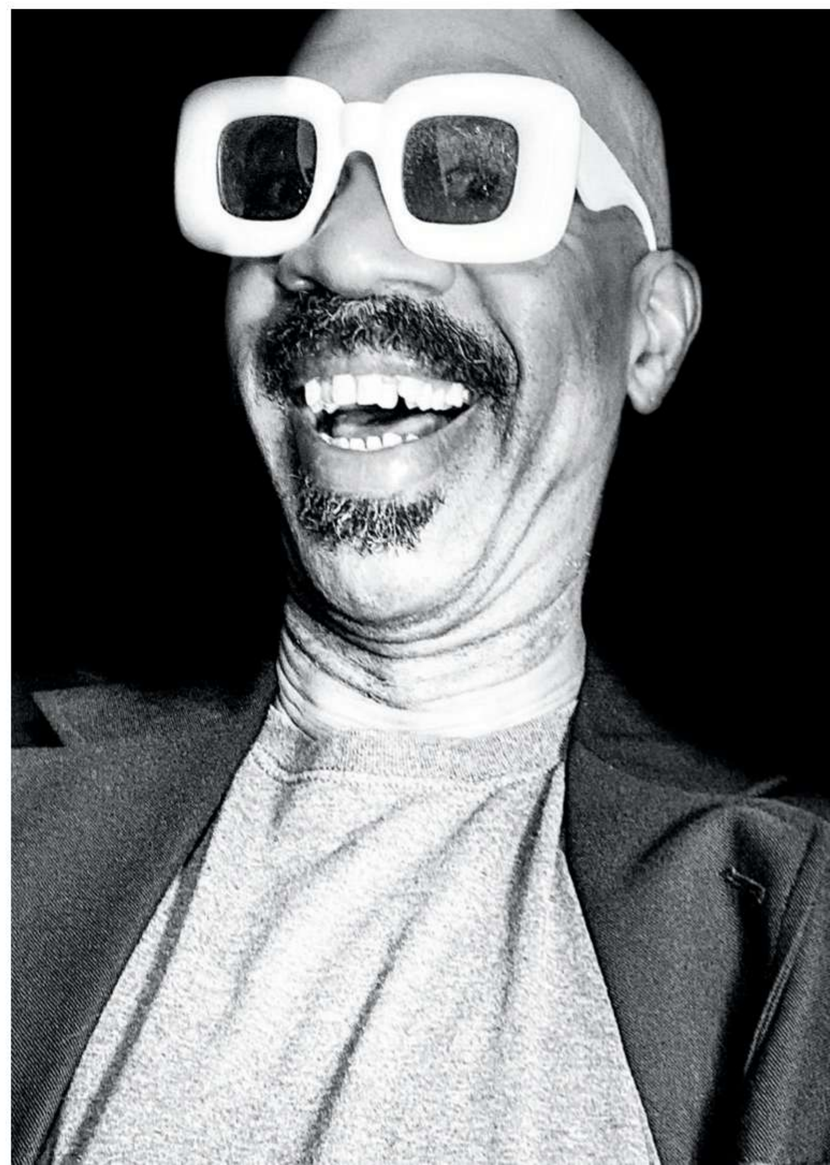


PHOTO TOP RIGHT BY JOHN MANARD, OTHER PHOTOS COURTESY OF JOHN DIMES

When his friend and collaborator C.W. Prather, inspired by a love of horror host Count Gore de Vol, approached Dimes about an opportunity to create a show for a local cable access channel, the comedian viewed it as a chance that was too good to pass up.

"It was this strange opportunity to really get into a kind of comedy that wouldn't work on stage. It would only play to a niche crowd… and I loved that," says Dimes about Sarcofiguy's inception. "To do horror-related comedy was totally my wheelhouse. I don't think I could have been a horror Pee-Wee Herman as a Black guy at the comedy club… but at the time, public access allowed any old body to make any old thing and express themselves as much as they could."

On Halloween 1995, Dr. Sarcofiguy's *The Spooky Movie* program debuted on Virginia's Falls Church Community TV (Channel 38) to a local audience, and a generation-defining horror host was born.

"I'm what you'd call an outgoing introvert, and Sarcofiguy gives me the opportunity to be an extrovert for however long that lasts," says Dimes about his alter-ego. "He's an obnoxious, garrulous version of myself. Am I funny? Yeah. But him? Sarcofiguy is everything that I'd like to be when I'm around people."

Whatever the appeal, for three decades counting, audiences have been drawn to Sarcofiguy and his unique brand of horror hijinks. The ongoing interest has afforded Dimes the ability to grow the character past his humble beginnings on cable access and take the diabolical Doctor into a plethora of new mediums.

Moving from Falls Church Community TV to digital with the advent of streaming video, the intervening years have seen Sarcofiguy pen books, host raucous live events at the likes of the AFI, create animated versions of himself, record an album of monster songs, and even do a stint on a radio show by way of *Sheena's Jungle Room* on WFMU.

Interestingly, Dr. Sarcofiguy also holds the particular distinction of being the first – and still only consistently working – Black horror host. And while Dimes proudly owns his place in genre history, he's quick to point out that, for him, Sarcofiguy was foremost a place to celebrate the things he loved, and the things he felt *needed* love.

"I wasn't setting out to be a pioneer, but I was setting out to be that Blerd [Black nerd] kid who loved some horror," he says. "A lot of horror hosts, I think, are frustrated actors – frustrated *people* – and we just want to be seen."

That balance of being seen, both as an individual and for the things one loves, seems core to the trajectory of both Dimes and his dynamic creation. A consistent mantra that has persisted across Dr. Sarcofiguy's tenure in televised terror has been his oft repeated quote: "There are no bad movies, only bad audiences."

In fact, it's an edict Dimes posits so often, it also served as the title for his 2010 book taking viewers to task for their poor behavior.

To that end, from his very beginnings of being uncertain how to explain his creative interest to his family, it seems undeniable that Dimes has always had a focus on finding the value in things that may be marginalized by the world at large. Often, that passion manifests in the movies he champions as Sarcofiguy, but the underlying message is clear: Though you may not understand or connect with something, it still matters.

"If you visit fan sites, you see how demeaning it can be," says Dimes. "People maligning each other just for the sake of doing it. It breaks my heart that as old as this planet is, we're still doing the same stupid shit all the time. Why can't you just let somebody enjoy themselves? Why must you make fun of others?"

Dismayed though he may be by the state of fan culture and its implications for attitudes in the world at large, Dimes nonetheless has found a way to use Sarcofiguy to persist in promoting passion above all else.

"I always root for human underdogs, cinematic underdogs, and literary underdogs," he says. "Don't belittle what I enjoy because you don't like it. That's why I wrote the book, because if you are feeling put upon by dickweeds, either give it a read and tell them something… or just throw the actual book at them."

"SARCOFIGUY IS EVERYTHING THAT I'D LIKE TO BE WHEN I'M AROUND PEOPLE."
- JOHN DIMES

With thirty years as Sarcofiguy under his belt, Dimes doesn't seem particularly interested in slowing down. If anything, the entertainer continues to push into new territory and media, all in continuous pursuit and celebration of the genre he loves.

Most recently, Dimes has appeared under his own name in several horror films, including Melissa LaMartina's *For Sale by Exorcist* and Chris LaMartina's forthcoming *Spirit Tasting* (which was co-written by the author of this article). However, while the occasional break from the character allows a little more elasticity in Dimes' forays into fright, a return to the good Doctor is always inevitable.

When speaking on the future of the character, Dimes inadvertently affirms Sarcofiguy's continued cross-platform charm.

"I would not mind actually playing Sarcofiguy in a movie, not necessarily by name, but by character. Maybe something that features him in a Chaplin-esque horror situation," he says, wistfully. "...or maybe do another album. I would love to have Sarcofiguy do a whole Parliament Funkadelic style album of horror, and tour with it."

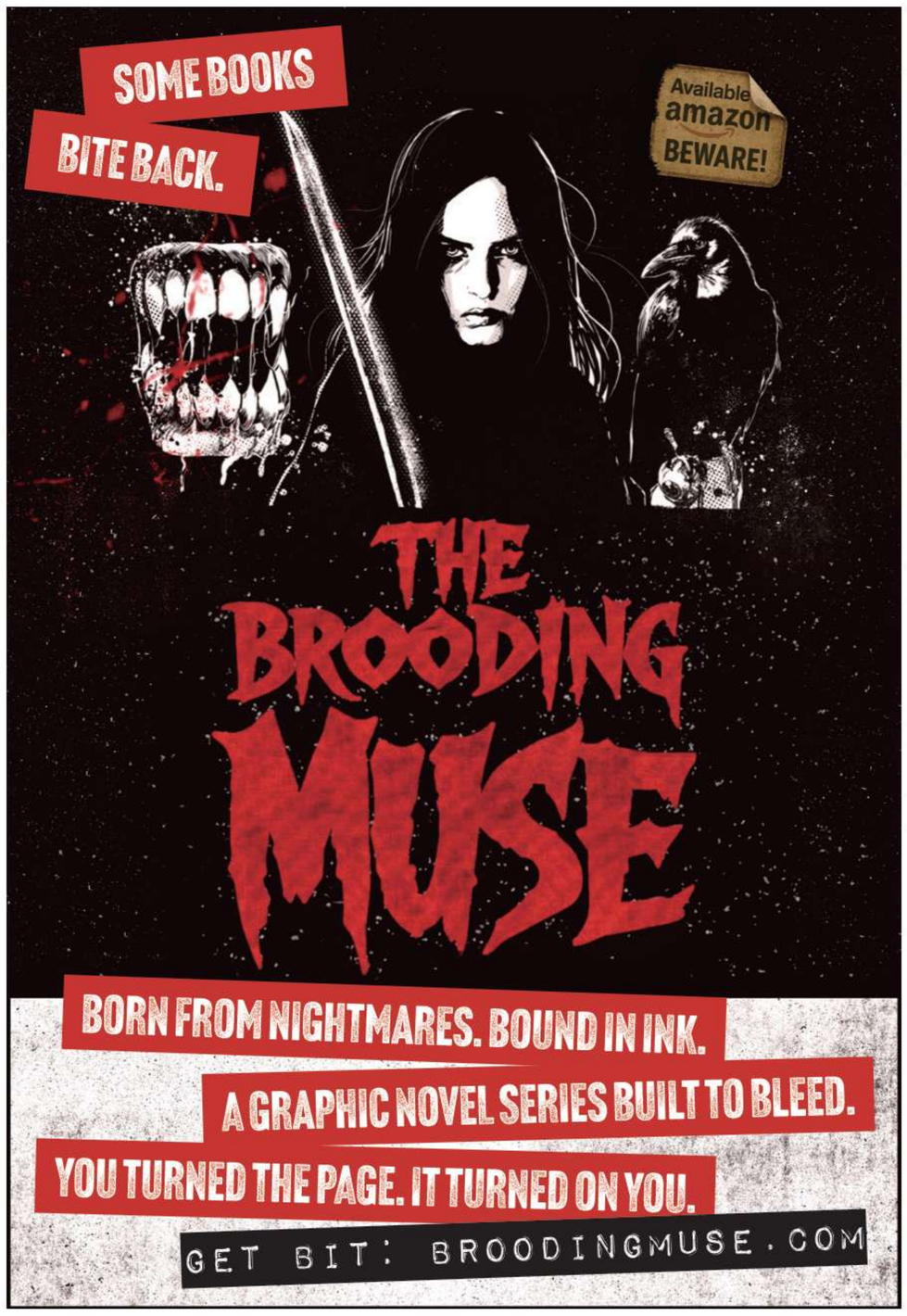
Though Sarcofiguy is, by Dimes' own admission, often ill-behaved, the character's refusal to be contained is most likely part of his broader appeal with genre fans. Though perhaps indirectly, Sarcofiguy's advocacy for the movies and art he considers to be maligned, in turn ends up a broader championing of the fans who have felt the sting of having their glow dimmed by the derision of another.

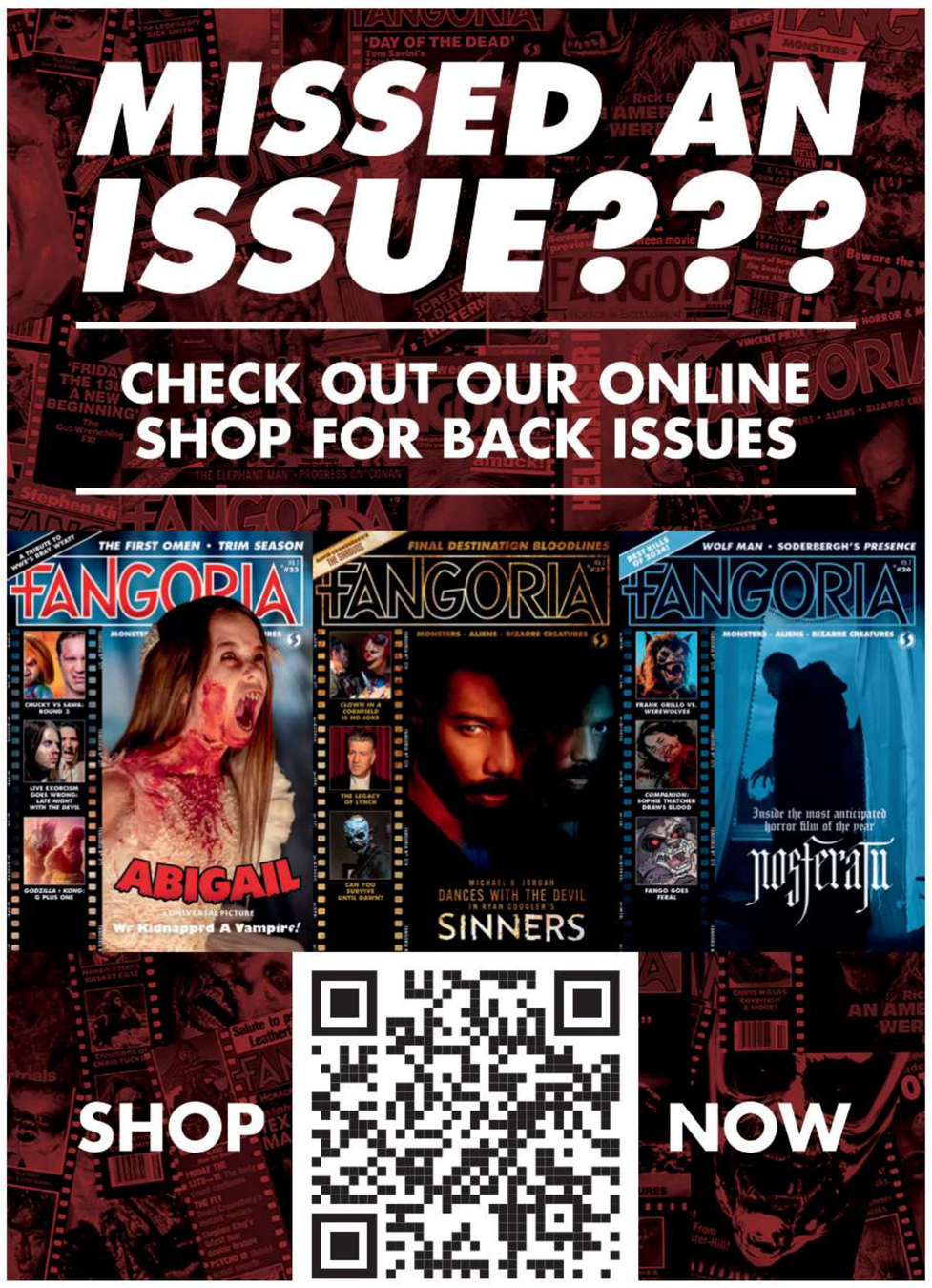
By persisting past *The Spooky Movie* program and into multiple aspects of genre visibility, Dr. Sarcofiguy has created an omnipresent reassurance that no matter what you love, you're not alone.

To that end, while John Dimes may have never set out to be a pioneer, by simply putting his passion on display and fighting for others to do the same, he blazed a trail nonetheless.

For the kid who at one time struggled to explain his interests, John Dimes has, in many ways, had the last laugh, and undeniably found his audience...

... and they're a *good* one. 💀





DUELING THE DOPPELGÄNGER

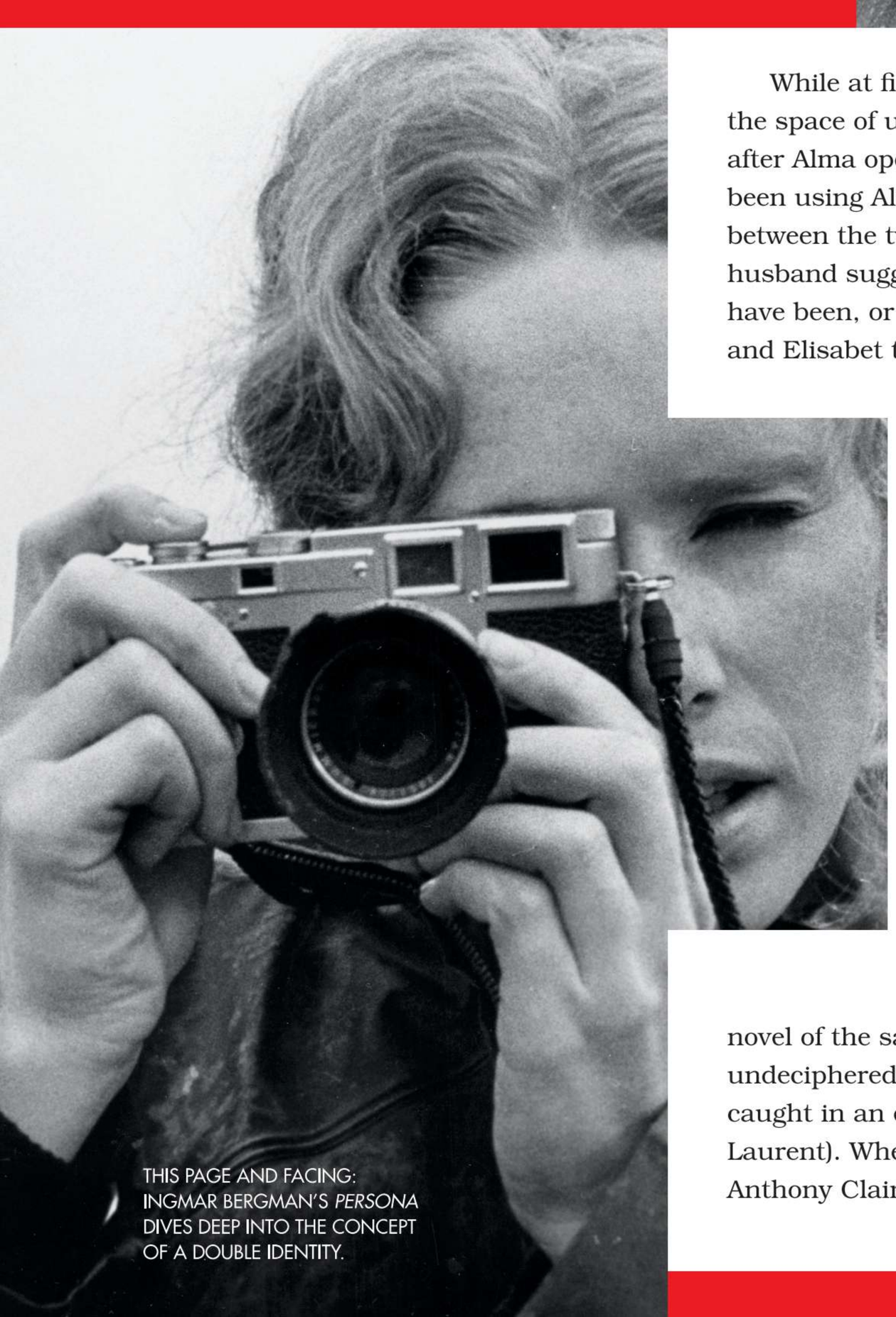
PART 2

BY RICHARD NEWBY

A HISTORY OF THE DOUBLE THROUGHOUT POPULAR MEDIA, IN (APPROPRIATELY) TWO PARTS.

READ PART 1 IN ISSUE 27, IN WHICH RICHARD DISCUSSES THE CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE DOPPELGÄNGER, HIS OWN ENCOUNTER WITH A DOUBLE, AND DAVID LYNCH'S EXAMINATION OF IDENTITY, MEMORY AND MIRRORING IN LOST HIGHWAY.

Just as a multitude of artists have been inspired by David Lynch, Lynch has drawn inspiration from others, most notably in this case Ingmar Bergman. Bergman's *Persona* explores the doppelgänger narrative through a young nurse, Alma (Bibi Andersson), and a stage actress, Elisabet Vogler (Liv Ullmann), with whom she becomes infatuated. Elisabet, who has inexplicably decided not to speak, is sent to her doctor's beachside cottage to recover, with Alma assigned as her caretaker. While Vogler remains silent, the timid Alma finds this seclusion as a means to find her voice (or perhaps steal it from Elisabet), sharing increasingly personal details of her life with Elisabet, including her guilt and despair over an orgy with two teenage boys and her friend which resulted in a pregnancy she aborted to keep the secret from her fiancé. Along with Alma's newfound voice and ability to vocalize the decision that haunts her, her look and mannerisms become wrapped up in Elisabet's, the two women becoming physically similar, a fulfillment of Alma's claim that she's been told before that she looks like she could be Elisabet Vogler.



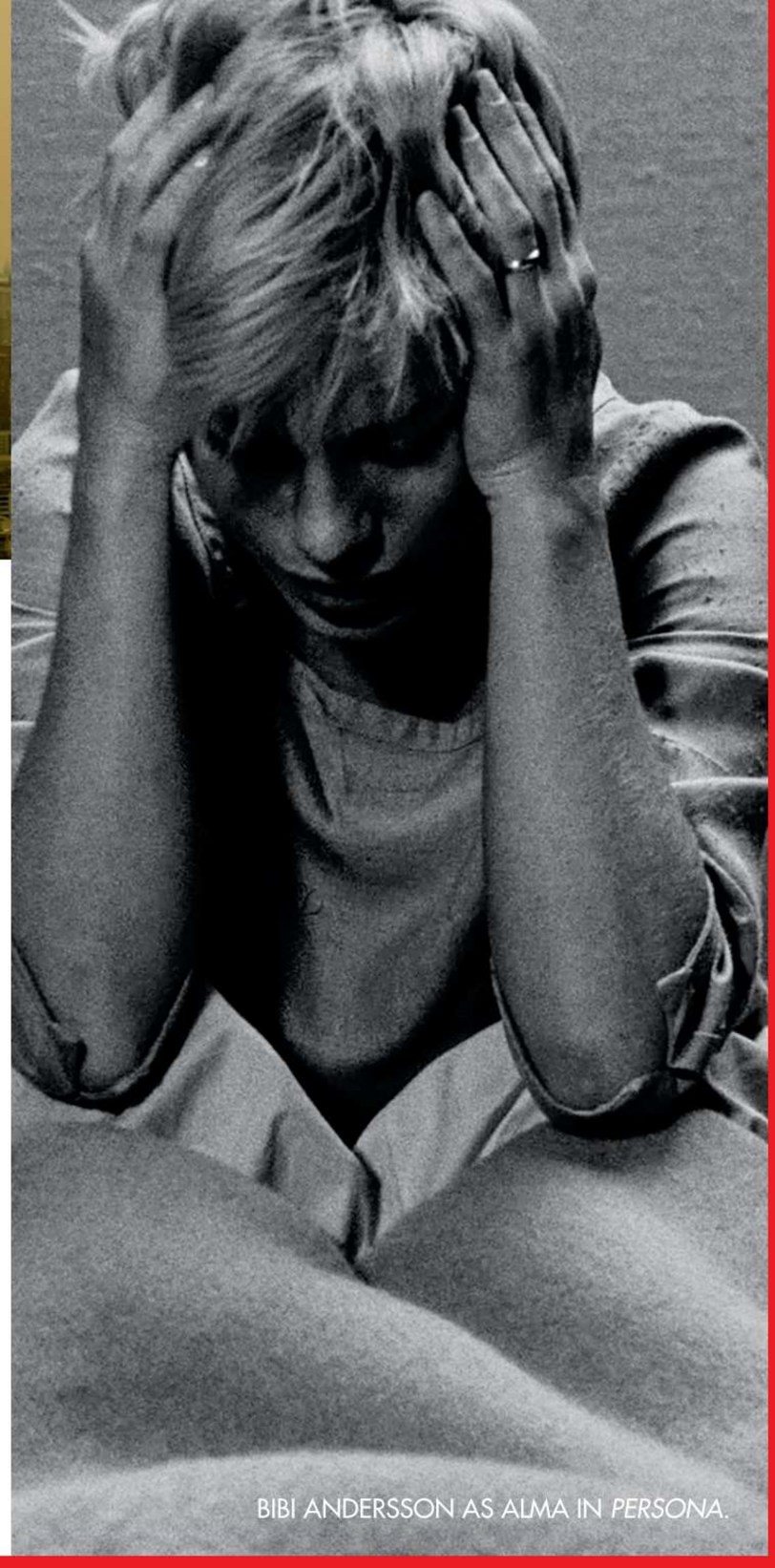
THIS PAGE AND FACING: INGMAR BERGMAN'S *PERSONA* DIVES DEEP INTO THE CONCEPT OF A DOUBLE IDENTITY.

While at first this all seems therapeutic for Alma and Elisabet, lingering in the space of unrequited queer romance, their relationship becomes muddled after Alma opens a letter written by Elisabet to her doctor that suggests she has been using Alma, studying her for a role. The lines increasingly begin to blur between the two women as animosity and mistrust grow. A visit from Elisabet's husband suggests that she and Alma are the same woman, and either always have been, or they have recently been absorbed into one another. Between Alma and Elisabet there is a give-and-take relationship that reflects nurturing and vampirism, an interesting duality of willingly giving oneself and taking something away. Fittingly, both acts are entangled in our vocabulary describing sex and death – to give life, to sacrifice oneself for others, to put out, to take life, to take virginity, to take over. This concept of sex and death, expressed by these phrases, plays heavily on our memories and identities by way of the stories we tell ourselves. The result of these forces in *Persona* raises the question of how much of Alma and Elisabet's lives are true and how much are the consequences of subjective memory and an attempt to assuage guilt brought on by sexual affairs and empty lives.

As *Persona* influenced *Lost Highway*, Lynch's films have inspired so many as to warrant their own descriptor: Lynchian. Denis Villeneuve's *Enemy* is one such film that's been called Lynchian, and it forms an unofficial trilogy with *Persona* and *Lost Highway*. Loosely based on Jose Saramago's 2002 novel, *The Double*, itself a literary doppelgänger of Dostoevsky's novel of the same name, *Enemy* opens with the sentence, "Chaos is order yet undeciphered." The film follows Adam Bell (Jake Gyllenhaal), a college professor caught in an emotionally empty relationship with his girlfriend, Mary (Mélanie Laurent). When a colleague recommends a film to Adam, he discovers an actor, Anthony Claire (Gyllenhaal) who is his spitting image. Anthony, self-centered

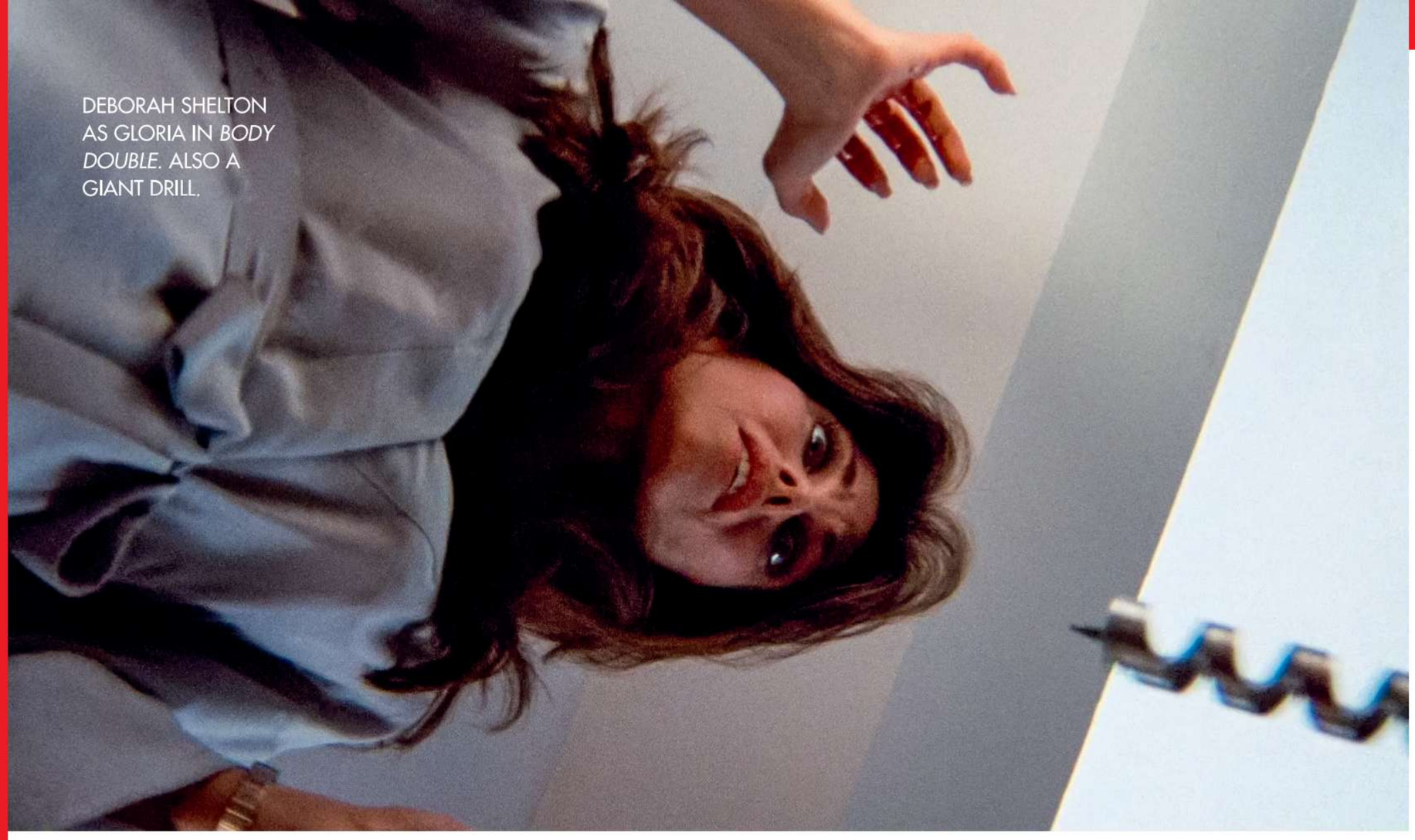
and aggressive, is in a fractured relationship with his pregnant wife, Helen (Sarah Gadon), and has a history of affairs and attending a secret club where women, whose faces we never see, perform sexual acts. When Adam tracks down Anthony, their two lives begin to overlap with Anthony stalking Adam and becoming convinced his double is having an affair with his wife, leading him to pursue Mary out of revenge. It becomes increasingly clear that Anthony and Adam are the same person – Adam having quit his job as a teacher to pursue acting under the stage name Anthony Claire, while cheating on Helen with Mary. Adam is caught between two lives, the stability of a steady job, marriage, and child, and the life of an actor, untethered to commitment, family, and monogamy.

Unlike *Lost Highway* and *Persona*, Adam can create a dividing line, with Anthony and Mary breaking up, symbolized by a car crash into a concrete barrier that kills them both at the same time that Adam and Helen climax, in a direct display of the themes of sex and death. It seems Adam has finally chosen stability with his wife, and he has at last found a way to control his chaotic tendencies. That is until he discovers an invite to the club that Anthony frequented, perhaps a real location or maybe just the concept of infidelity. When he tells Helen he might have to go out that night, he walks into the room and sees that she has turned into a giant spider, cowering in the corner of their bedroom, leading Adam to let out a heavy sigh. The


BIBI ANDERSSON AS ALMA IN *PERSONA*.

NOTHING IS OFF LIMITS AND NO ONE IS SAFE WHEN OUR LIVES ARE SUBJECT TO RECONTEXTUALIZATION BY THE OTHER.

ONE JAKE GYLLENHAAL
AND THAT'S NOT ALL.



DEBORAH SHELTON AS GLORIA IN *BODY DOUBLE*. ALSO A GIANT DRILL.

spider seems to represent his fear of attachment, commitment, and control. And it seems if not then, but at some time soon, Adam will step back into chaos, repeating the cycle and perhaps catching himself in a loop, or web, of shutting out the truth of his life and obligations. Yet, unlike Fred/Pete in *Lost Highway* and Alma/Elisabet in *Persona*, there seems to be some hope for Adam to create a permanent barrier to commit and be happy, to find order, as the opening quote suggests.

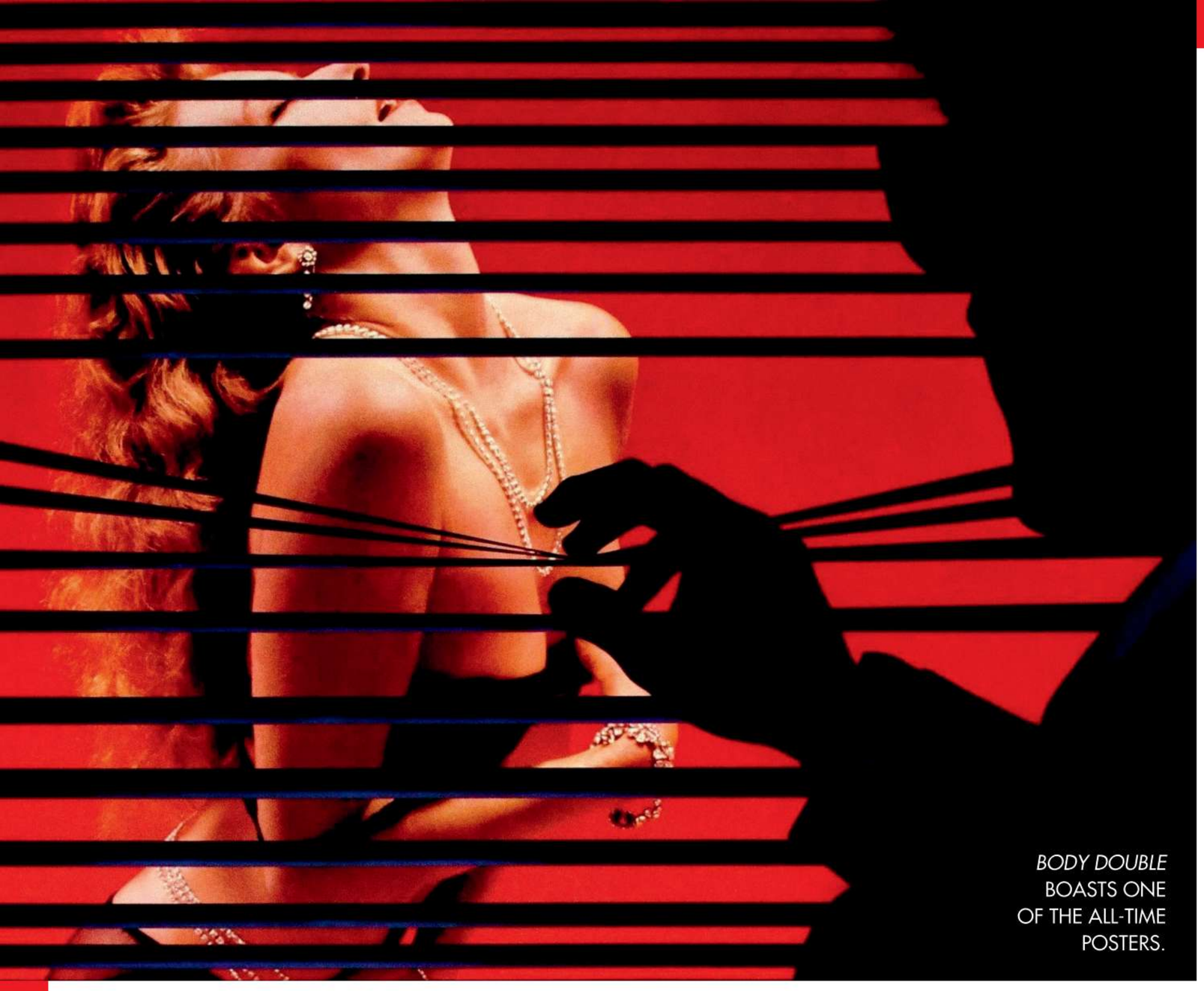
"It's all about control," Adam says during one of his lectures, which leads to yet another perspective on the doppelgänger. One filmmaker has built much of his career around doppelgängers, doubles and cases of mistaken identities: Brian De Palma, who has never been able to outrun the shadow of his own influences. Brian De Palma's films are often described as Hitchcockian, yet all the while his influence has rarely, if ever, been called De Palmian. Many critics over the years have referred to his films as sensationalized riffs on Hitchcock's films, incorporating all the blood and nudity the previous era wouldn't allow. Yet, it still feels like a disservice to only look at De Palma in the context of Hitchcock, particularly when a number of his films feel like the direct precursors to our modern considerations of doubles as means to create sinister forms of control, rather than the chaos Bergman and Lynch courted.

When looking at *Persona*, *Lost Highway*, and *Enemy*, stage presence becomes key to these characters' abilities to live out their double lives (real and imagined), whether that be playing the saxophone in a club, making pornography, acting on the stage, or in indie films. But De Palma looked at the power of performance outside of its meaning to the performer, instead looking at it through a voyeuristic lens of the outsider, characters enticed by the eroticism of something they think they can possess in the face of their inability to have the real thing. De Palma, inspired by Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, *Vertigo* and *Psycho*, offered his own consideration of the falseness of art, identity, and Hollywood in *Obsession* and *Body Double*. In both these films, women putting on an act become unwilling subjects to the unfulfilled sexual desires of men. There is an infatuation with the surface, as both Michael Courtland (Cliff Robertson) in *Obsession* and Jake (Craig Wasson) in *Body Double* are drawn to women who look like the dead women they were originally drawn to.

There's a moment in *Obsession* when Sandra (Geneviève Bujold), the spitting image of Michael's deceased wife Elizabeth, asks what his wife was like. He only describes her in physical terms, the length of her hair, the way she walked, and her beauty. The tone of the scene is suggestive of enduring romance, but the reality of the scene, as De Palma knows, is disconcerting. Michael's description dehumanizes Elizabeth, failing to observe any interior identity, which is also the reason he is so quickly drawn to Sandra, not for who she is but for how she looks.

It's a fake romance, an imitation of one, just like the tomb for Michael's wife and daughter, modeled after the church where he met Elizabeth, and the painting of the Madonna inside that church, covering up another, earlier work of art. De Palma takes this idea of sinister fakery a step further in *Body Double*, in which a struggling actor, Jake, spies on his neighbor Gloria (Deborah Shelton) as she masturbates each night, though he can't see her face. He becomes obsessed with her body, rather than her personhood, and when she is murdered and it's revealed that porn star Holly (Melanie Griffith) was putting on the nightly show for him for a frame job she'd been hired to do, Jake becomes obsessed with her, too, to the point where the film's Hollywood ending feels like pure fantasy. This idea of humans being interchangeable, bodies with blank faces, or bodies without personalities that we can project onto, only meant for our pleasure, serves as a presage to our current considerations of deep fakes and AI, and our ability to manufacture a reality with digital doppelgängers.

The digital doppelgänger may be the most frightening form of the double yet because it's no longer simply tied to stories, the supernatural, and comic book conceptions of psychosis. Unlike artists who borrow pieces from those who inspired them, deepfakes and AI tools cannot create art. It is the antithesis of art, and slowly but surely, it is destroying truth. One of the most common myths about doppelgängers is that meeting one face-to-face is a death sentence. And while the digital age has in some way guarded us from believing in such superstitions, it's also left us open to new forms of attack. No scene in a horror movie has made my blood run cold quite like the doppelgänger reveal in Joel Anderson's docufiction film, *Lake Mungo*, which explores the drowning of a teenage girl and the possibility that her ghost is trying to make contact with her family. In the scene, Alice Palmer (Talia



BODY DOUBLE BOASTS ONE OF THE ALL-TIME POSTERS.

Zucker) is walking the beach at night, her phone out, dimly lighting the way forward. She sees a figure walking toward her, its features obscured by the darkness. Neither she nor the viewer can make out what she sees until it's right up on her, in front of her camera. The figure is her own corpse, her face bloated and bruised, appearing just as she would later be discovered after drowning. Though she only saw her doppelgänger through a digital copy, it still proved to have power over her. And these digital copies that we've become so fond of in their many forms also have power over us.

Whether it be through the ease of everyone making their photos available at all times, an app that finds your celebrity lookalike, or digital abominations created by AI and deepfakes, we are more enticed than ever by the idea of someone who looks like us or people we seemingly know, and we're willing to obscure the truth of our lives and others for a manufactured version of it. And when it comes to AI and deepfake tech there is not only an increasingly socially acceptable excuse to steal and lie, but to control: identity, memory, sex, and even death. We're caught in our own global Stepford, except unlike Bryan Forbes' *The Stepford Wives*, where the exterior of perfect houses, perfect lawns, and perfect wives masked the evil below the surface, we gleefully frolic in the naked ugliness we've made of things.

This perverse form of control is exhibited through attempts to mislead voters with fake footage and soundbites that will quickly become a weapon of war. It's exhibited by ensuring actors, musicians, comedians, and other artists never really have to die as long as studios and producers own the rights to their likenesses and art. Writers have watched as their work has dwindled as websites become consumed by the use of ChatGPT and other similar programs that not only copy the voice of one individual but multiple, creating a sort of Brundlefly doppelgänger made of multiple entities. Nothing is off limits and no one is safe when our lives are subject to recontextualization by the other. Not even America's sweetheart, Taylor Swift, the biggest pop star in the world, has been able to escape her likeness being copied and abused, as sexually explicit AI images of Swift made the rounds on Twitter a few months ago, which should be considered a new form of sexual abuse, a real-life, 21st-century approach to what De Palma explored. Many of us know these digital doppelgängers are fake at the moment, though surely not as many as we'd hope, and people are getting better at making them, better at using them as tools to explore their chaotic, destructive, and erotic selves without considering the possible outcomes with technology so new, and unregulated.

23 years ago, I escaped my doppelgänger, and there should be serenity in that. But that wasn't the end. I've grown to worry about yours, whether you manifested them yourself, or they were manifested for you, and how they're set to change our art, our culture, our world. We have toyed with technologies that have allowed our lives to be disrupted and haunted by lies, to the point where not even our legacies are secured anymore. In the future, will anyone be remembered for who and what they were? Or will we simply be remembered by our doppelgängers, the pictures we never posed for, the things we never said, and the actions we never performed? The duel may have already been lost, and the lines permanently broken, either by the choices we made or that someone made for us. This leaves us to face the scariest possibility, that who we are is also who we currently aren't, and the difference is only a decision away. 💀

PERSONA'S ALMA (ANDERSSON) HITTING ROCK BOTTOM.

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OH HE'S *HOWLING (II)*, ALL RIGHT.

GETTING WEIRD IN 1985

BY BRIAN W. COLLINS

FORTY YEARS AGO, FOUR OF THE MOST OFF-BEAT HORROR SEQUELS EVER MADE WERE RELEASED.

WE'D KNOW THOSE BOOTS ANYWHERE.

From a creative standpoint, the hardest thing about making a sequel is trying to figure out exactly what people enjoyed about the first movie so you can give them more of it, while also adding a new spin that hopefully won't repel those very same ticket buyers. Since our beloved genre is practically built on roman numerals, it's safe to say that many filmmakers have successfully figured out that formula across countless franchises. However, sometimes they make miscalculations that result in fascinatingly polarizing entries.

Forty years ago we somehow got four such examples: *Friday the 13th Part V: A New Beginning*, *Howling II*, *The Hills Have Eyes Part 2*, and *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* were all released in 1985 to bewildered and even downright angry fans. Naturally, they all (well, maybe not *Hills*) had their supporters at the time, and over the years have even seen their reputations improve. But first impressions are hard to overcome, and each film undeniably went a bit too far off-track for fans of the previous entries.

New Beginning comes closest to being a "normal" sequel, as it dutifully features a guy in a hockey mask killing teens near Crystal Lake. But it wasn't the REAL Jason, as a vengeful paramedic named Roy Burns donned the mask instead. The film opened well, but director Danny Steinmann's 42nd Street sensibilities and the well-meaning-but-too-late attempt to go back to the mystery of the original left many fans cold.

At least Roy stuck to his predecessor's MO. In *Freddy's Revenge*, Freddy Krueger doesn't bother much with any of the teens besides Jesse (Mark Patton), focusing only on him in an attempt to escape the dream world – by literally coming out of the young man's body, somehow. Most of Krueger's havoc takes place in the real world, plainly visible to people who aren't sleeping (the pool party massacre being the most memorable, if baffling, example), as if the filmmakers forgot about the first full word of their movie's title.

That said, *Elm Street 2* is certainly a more *interesting* film than it got credit for at the time, with the homoerotic subtext giving it more weight than some of the other sequels. It's hard to say the same for *The Hills Have Eyes Part II*, which boasted the return of director Wes Craven (the film was shot prior to his *Elm Street*, but released after), though it could have been anyone behind the camera for all that mattered. Because two words define this movie: dog flashbacks.

Yes, Beast the dog, who survived the first *Hills*, occasionally has flashbacks to the events of that film in order to pad the sequel's runtime. Bobby also

MARK PATTON'S MEMORABLE TURN AS JESSE IN *ANOES2*.

KAREN WHITE DOES SOME *HOWLING* OF HER OWN (*II*).

returns, but only in the first reel or so, creating the synthetic motor oil used by our new crop of heroes, a team of motocross bikers (huh?). And Ruby, one of the first film's mutants, is now fairly normal and accompanying our protagonists for some reason. To be fair, this sequel had well-documented production problems and was released essentially unfinished, but what's there is so janky it's hard to believe Craven was involved at all.

Joe Dante displayed better sense by having nothing to do with *Howling II*, which carries two separate subtitles (*Werewolf Bitch* and *Your Sister is a Werewolf*) but zero scares or charm, something his original offered in spades. The basic plot is actually fine: the brother of Dee Wallace's character from the original teams up with a reporter and a werewolf hunter (Christopher Lee) to track down the source of the werewolf menace – perfectly OK, right?

Unfortunately, everything about it, from the bulk of the non-Lee cast to the paltry werewolf action, makes it easy to see why no one wanted to distribute it in theaters here, and it was ultimately dumped to video. Apart from the famous anecdote about Lee apologizing to Dante for being in it, the only memorable thing about the sequel is the end-credits sequence, which repeats a shot of star Sybil Danning ripping off her top over a dozen times.

So, what went wrong here? Too many cooks in the kitchen? Screenwriting sessions aided by New Coke? (Or, being the '80s, perhaps just, er, "coke"?). Again, each of these films has their fans then and now, but overall perception tends to be along the lines of "WTF." Even fans of these sequels can see why people were so disappointed with them. But the fact that these very wonky entries all came out within months of each other, in a year with no other traditional genre sequels (*Day of the Dead* comes closest, and that one also took a while to find its rightful appreciation), is a charming anomaly to celebrate in our anniversary-loving modern world. Happy 40th to these crazy kids. Maybe they were just misunderstood.

HARD TO BELIEVE CRAVEN SIGNED OFF ON *THE HILLS HAVE EYES PART 2*.

A F***ING

BY NEIL McROBERT

HORROR NOVELIST C.J. LEEDE MADE WAVES WITH HER FIRST NOVEL, AND HER SOPHOMORE EFFORT CONTINUES TO ROCK THE BOAT.

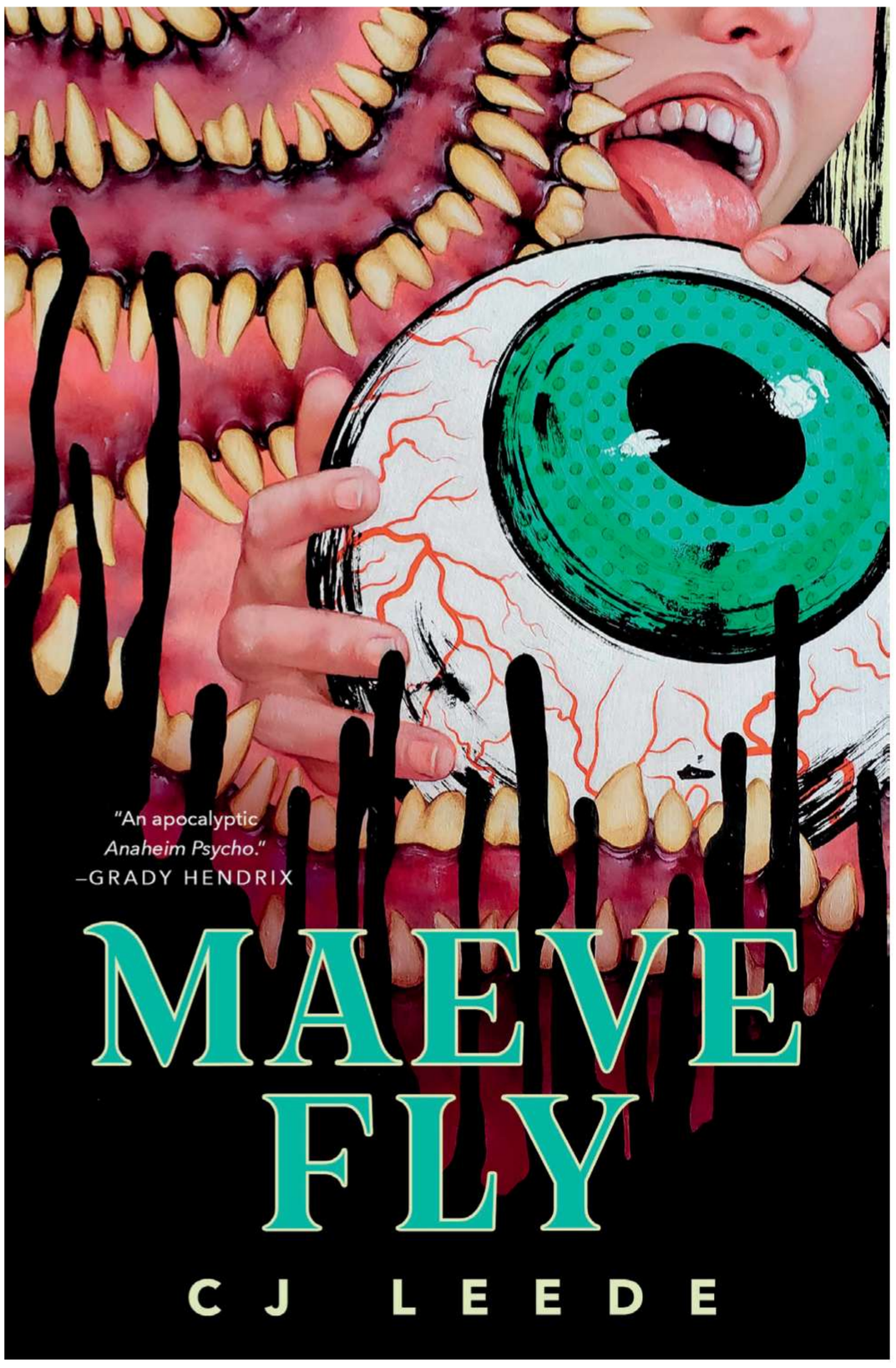
C.J. Leede wants to provoke you.

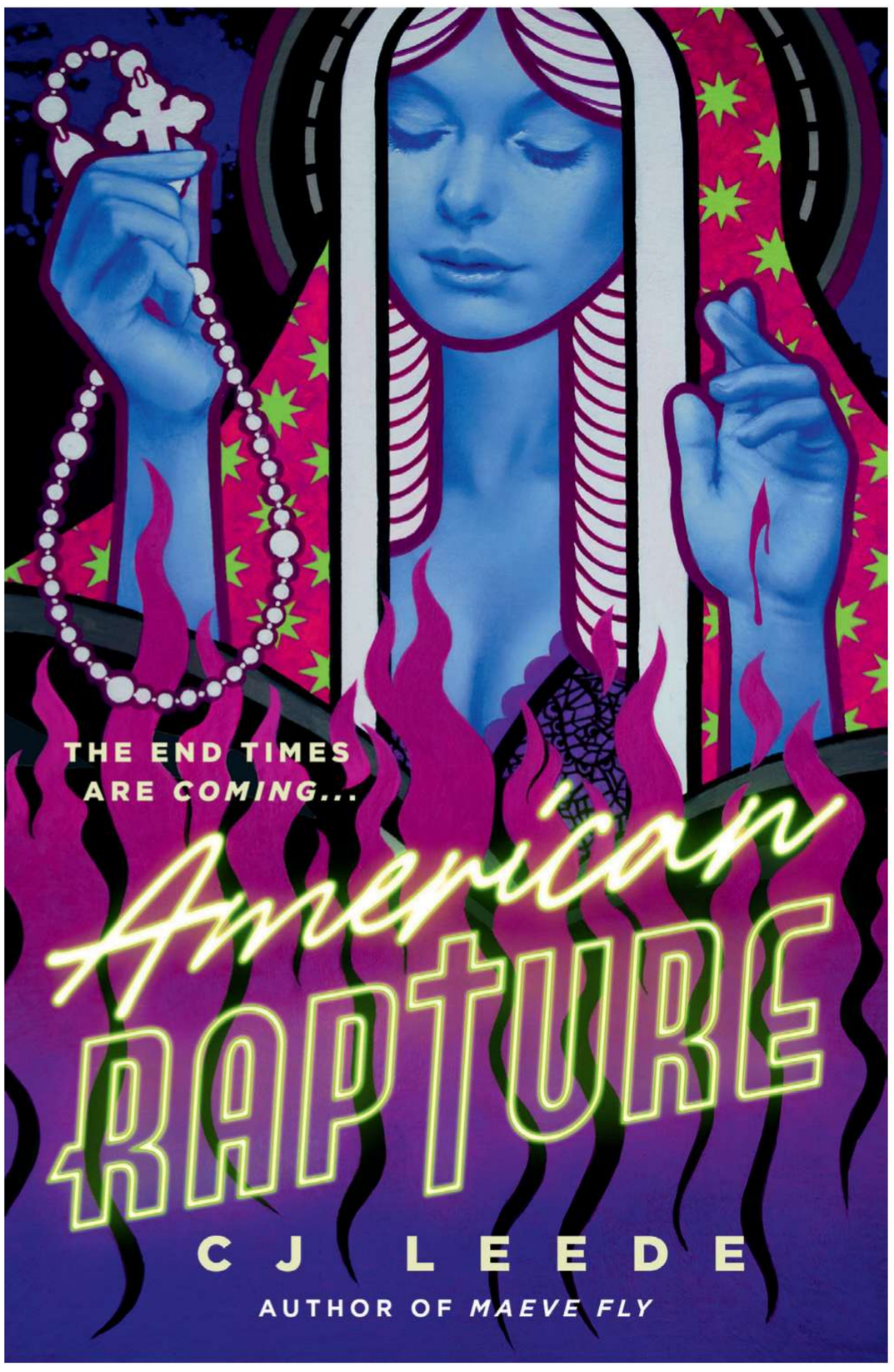
She's made that very clear from the start. Just two books into her career, Leede is already celebrated for bringing a feminist perspective to the male-dominated extremity of horror fiction. It will certainly be a provocation to some, these stories coming out at a time when women's autonomy is under siege from a shrill resurgence of popular misogyny. Andrew Tate would fucking hate C.J. Leede. I imagine that would please her immensely.

MAEVE FLY AND *AMERICAN RAPTURE* AUTHOR C.J. LEEDE.

PHOTO BY SYDNEY ANGEL

MAEVE FLY AND AMERICAN RAPTURE





Leede's 2023 debut, *Maeve Fly*, applied a female spin to ultra-violence and sexual depravity. Specifically, the novel riffs on Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*, with the disturbed Maeve a gender-flipped Patrick Bateman, as proficient at slaughtering a vanload of misogynists as she is applying a curling iron to her female victim's most sensitive parts. Like Bateman, she is a predator hiding in plain sight. But whereas Ellis' psycho was camouflaged by the hypermasculinity of the finance world, Maeve hides in her feminine performance as a Disneyland Princess. Leede's provocation is not so much the violence – audaciously brutal, but nothing new to a seasoned horror reader – as it is the code switching between her job and her afterwork habits. The hands that Maeve puts to work in her torture basement, she also uses to comfort and delight visiting children. It's an appalling, hilarious dissonance, and it shows that, like all the best provocateurs, Leede has a real sense of humor. "None of it," she says, "should be taken too seriously."

Her follow-up has its funny moments, too. But they are harder to spot amidst all the stuff that does everything *but* make you laugh. *American Rapture* is just as vicious, and even more aggressively sexual than *Maeve Fly*. But whereas Leede's debut was a Vantablack joke, *American Rapture* is a head-on collision with much more serious things. You could call it horror's great State of the Nation novel.

It took Leede over a decade to write. She began during her final year of an undergraduate degree in medieval history – a discipline that would seem to have little in common with the contemporary horror she writes now. However, you wonder if the barbarism and patriarchy of the Middle Ages hasn't had some influence on her depiction of hell on Earth. *American Rapture* was also first conceived in the midst of the US Ebola outbreak, though since then we've had other health crises that have supercharged the novel's commentary on the American psyche.

An epidemic outbreak in America. Initial symptoms are similar to COVID, and Leede loads her world-building with all the cynicism, hypocrisy and disinformation that we should remember from that moment in history. It's already a nightmarish scenario before Leede introduces her kicker: a mutation that turns the infected into raging, uber-sexualized monsters. At the start of this outbreak, we meet Sophie, the sheltered, virginal child of religious parents. Sex is already a terror and a mystery to Sophie, making her well-equipped to survive the events to come, but also wholly vulnerable to them. We follow her as she embarks on one of those journeys that this kind of fiction does so well. She encounters challenges, gathers friends, fights adversaries and learns something about herself and her sexuality along the way. It's all very entertaining and

> LEEDE HAS WRITTEN HORROR FICTION'S MOST DIRECT CONFRONTATION WITH THE CURRENT BATTLE FOR THE AMERICAN FEMALE BODY.

uplifting, apart from the many moments that scour your soul. One particular death, late in the novel, ruined my whole week. Forget the buzzy blurbs claiming that it's *American Gods* meets *The Last of Us*; this is *The Road* directed by mid-'90s Paul Verhoeven.

Still, there is reassurance to this particular apocalypse being written by someone like Leede. In other hands it could be a queasy affair. I'm not going to say that male authors shouldn't write about whatever they want. But maybe, just maybe, the story of a young woman, navigating a scorched earth of sexual threat and murder, benefits from a young, female perspective.

That's not to say that Leede holds back. She's certainly not squeamish about pursuing her concept to problematic extremes. Sophie's first encounter with the… let's call them sex zombies… is none other than her parents. She comes home to find these repressed zealots on the living room floor, "pushing, pulling, clawing at one another in a steady, unapologetic rhythm." It's the worst possible version of walking in on your mom and dad screwing, but it gets even grimmer when they turn their attentions to her. Trigger warnings abound. For those who are worried: she gets away.

That's just the first attack, though. The journey takes in overrun refugee centers, a dizzying, traumatic night in Wisconsin's The House on the Rock, and a traffic jam that reads like a mix of *28 Days Later* and the music video for R.E.M's "Everybody Hurts." Amidst all the setpieces and splatter, *American Rapture*'s satirical undercurrent thrums in the background. YouTube is flooded with pastors placing spiritual blame and taking cold hard cash. Sophie passes billboards advertising sex aids and abstinence side by side. Sex sells; so does religion. Capitalism is creaming it from both sides. Leede's novel skewers the cynicism embedded in American sexual politics, which is why the timing of its release, just a few weeks before the 2024 election, felt so pointed. Leede has written horror fiction's most direct confrontation with the current battle for the American female body. The book, Leede says, "is about growing up in this country. You're taught that your entire value is your body and your sexuality. Yet at the same time it's your greatest sin and shame and you have to hide it away, for your soul, and for souls of the men around you."

American Rapture is no man-hating screed, however. The disease infects both men and women, and both are a threat to Sophie. At the same time, Leede has written a remarkably sex-positive book, considering the threat that lust poses in this story. The outbreak coincides with the awakening of Sophie's sexuality, a parallel that Leede uses to great effect, keeping us worried throughout that maybe these normal adolescent urges are a sign of infection. There are genuine moments of tenderness and attraction, and Leede is very careful that *American Rapture* can't be taken as, in any way, contributing to the idea that sex is bad. It does seem an almost impossible trick to pull off though, like preserving the delights of meat-eating in a novel about cannibalism.

"It's not sex that's the problem," she explains. "It's the repression. The ignorance. Unless you're asexual, you are going to become a sexual creature. And if you spend your life thinking that there's something wrong with you because of it, that is just an impossible way to live."

Even in an apocalypse?

"Yeah," she says. "Even then it'd be a fucking nightmare."

'A Fucking Nightmare' would make a great subtitle for *American Rapture*. It's also how a certain type of person would describe everything she represents as a writer: outspoken, uncontrolled, resolutely female. And provocative as hell. 💀

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THE DEAD ARE LIVING AT GASH

BY JESSE A.

THROB ZOMBIE'S CREEPY, SEXY HORROR DRAG SHOW - CO-PRESENTED BY FANGORIA - RAISES THE BOSTON-AREA DEAD ON THE REGULAR.

Slasher-esque '90s synthwave plays over the growling crowd, and you take a sip of your Jason Drinks Manhattan. The red rhinestones felt excessive at first, but they really make the slit in your throat pop. Lining the walls: everything from screen-printed patches, paintings with monsters as the muses, kinky leatherwares, an SPFX artist with a booth where you can get your own fresh gash for cash. The chandelier-lit fright night is now packed with all the putrid pageantry that you'd expect from a monster mashing of a loud and proud queer culture with gleeful horror fans. You take another sip and look over your shoulder, reminded that the dead man at the door warned you about the werewolves (hungry haunt actors hunting on the dance floor).

The show is about to start. Your friend joins you with hot buttery popcorn and a Michael Myers Mai Tai. It's Gash night, and what's on the menu is camp, drag, laughs, and blood.

The entertainment roars to life as Boston's hometown shapeshifter, high-pitched vladdy and intense promoter of delight in the dark, drag king Throb Zombie hits the stage with his iconic sharp smile. Of *The Boulet Brothers Dragula* notoriety, Throb is an explosive drag monster, and Gash is their playground. A live theatre monstrosity of what he loves most, all stitched together like a Frankenstein love child. Haunted houses, timeless horror cinema, the strange imagination of drag and burlesque, cultivated into a single event to provide a fun, immersive escape for likeminded weirdos.

The festivities unfold with a fearsome floor show of horror drag artists and gorelesque dancers. Elevated dreamers and schemers from Boston's underground queer arts scene and honored, traveling show ghoul guests make up the lethal lineup. The crowd is soon feral, encouraged by their host to scream with the desperation and volume of a final girl for the talent. The delicious, demonic Throb welcomes all in this madness, as Leatherface-inspired pole dancers twirl, killer klowns get 'outer' their clothing, and Norman Bates shows you who mother really is.

After a full cast encore featuring Gash's personal "blood tent," frenzied attendees are led away to tonight's final offering. Through a secret door, revealed is a real jawdropper. A 900-seater, stunning, historical vaudeville turned movie theatre that *surely* must be haunted. All that's left to do is choose balcony or floor seating, as the lights dim, projector whirls, and a crowd now as friendly as a group of old friends, united for their love of horror artistry and the joyful macabre, cheer on the horrific, hilarious, and campy antics that ensue on screen. Tonight? We're watching *Re-Animator*. The crowd erupts in unison, "CAT DEAD, DETAILS LATER!"

Gash is a labor of love, slime and community, curated by a tiny but tenacious team. One full year of Gash is about to round out, and the nightmare is growing. Upcoming programming for this nefarious night out will be a continued offering of themed nights: Ghostship Gala, Slumber Party Massacre Pajama Party, a twisted, and immersive Black Mass for the high holy month of October. The future will have bigger sets, bigger antics, more monsters, the better to drag our beloved victims deeper and deeper into a gripping experience where monsters roam and crowds scream.

So if you're local, or just passing through the Boston area and looking into the darkness… Gash is looking back. And sending you a ticket link. 💀

SCENES FROM A GASH: (TOP, L-R) THROB ZOMBIE, MADISON ZAYNE, LUCY BLUESKIES AND FUNNY BONES BRING IT; (MIDDLE) RUSTY HAMMER NAILS IT; (BOTTOM) STABITHA CHRISTIE KILLS IT.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JESSE A.

When he hugs you, he'll never stop.

Your friend Huggy, Huggy Wuggy.

Huggy, Huggy

"His name is

A HUG A DAY KEEPS THE MONSTERS AWAY:

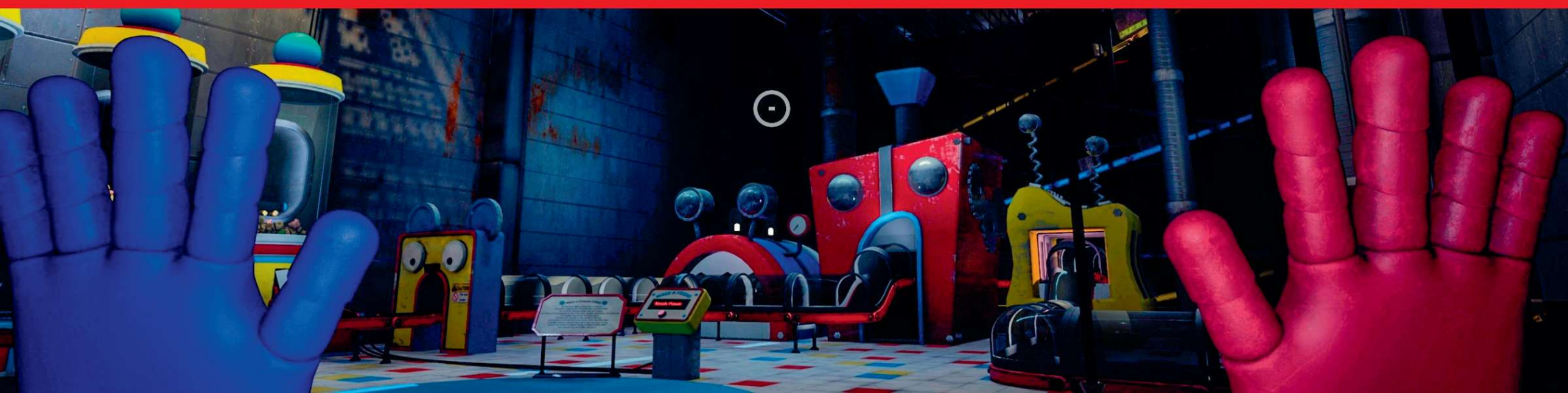
CHATTING WITH THE CREATORS OF

POPPY PLAYTIME™

BY REBEKAH MCKENDRY

He'll squeeze you until you pop!"

! THE SURVIVAL HORROR VIDEO GAME IS TAKING THE WORLD BY STORM. ISN'T IT TIME YOU PLAYED? !



I've always been an avid horror gamer, from my first NES in the '90s to my beloved PS5 today. But a new level of joy was added to my gaming once I had kids. Yes, I still love my super intense (and very adult) horror games, but I'm having just as much fun watching my middle schoolers discover spooky games on their own. Last year, my kids were playing a game when I heard screams coming from the living room… my favorite type of screams: jump-scare screams! I walked in to find them playing a game called *Poppy Playtime*. And before I knew it, I was delightedly screaming right along with them. And mind you, this game is not exactly made for kids. It's full of scares! But it has captivated tweens and adults alike.

Poppy Playtime is an episodic survival horror game that was first released in 2021, and almost immediately took younger horror fans by storm. As the player, you have a first-person POV of a retired employee of a toy company called Playtime Co., which was doing weird experiments on toys when the staff mysteriously disappeared. Now you are returning, years later, to find the factory populated by toys that have come to life, many of them evil and seeking revenge.

In Chapter One, you'll quickly encounter one of the stars and villains of the game, Huggy Wuggy, a blue, gangly, towering toy with a massive, fanged smile and giant arms to squeeze you to death. The game is packed with tension, consistently well-executed jump scares, and oodles of mystery about what was really happening at the Playtime Co. factory. Both my kids and I were hooked, and now with *Poppy Playtime: Chapter 4* just released this year, I'm even more obsessed. The franchise just keeps upping the scares, world-building, and clues.

I had the honor of chatting with *Poppy Playtime* creators (and brothers) Zach and Seth Belanger about the creation of *Poppy Playtime* and how this game took both horror-loving adults and tweens by storm, as well as what's on the horizon for Poppy and the gang.

THE PLAYTIME CO. FACTORY HAS BEEN SHUTTERED, BUT IT STILL BRINGS THE SHUDDERS.

Where did the idea for *Poppy Playtime* first come from?

Zach: The idea for *Poppy Playtime* came from our desire to challenge ourselves to create something eerie and unpredictable. While the jump-scare nature provides an element of unpredictability, we wanted this horror experience to have depth and engage players in mystery, long after they've finished playing. As for Playtime Co., we drew inspiration from Ideal, which was the toy factory famous for creating the original teddy bear in the early 1900s… before it became defunct.

Seth: Beyond having a deep backstory, we drew quite a bit of inspiration from other movies, games and media in the horror genre that were visually appealing, including *Hereditary*. It was easy deciding on the horror genre as the direction that we wanted to take, as that is the type of media we are interested in ourselves.

Was the now-iconic Huggy Wuggy inspired by anything in particular? How did you go about crafting him?

Seth: With Huggy Wuggy, our goal was to design a character that felt both welcoming and creepy at the same time. His long limbs, wide grin, and soft fur give off this misleading sense of friendliness. But the more you look, the more you see! He is always silently watching you – which adds to the creeping cinematic horror atmosphere that we enjoy creating for our fans.

Zach: We wanted a character that could be the face of the franchise, but with his own uniqueness. Huggy Wuggy's design is simple yet effective. Once a children's toy, now instilling fear.

***Poppy Playtime* creates both a fun world but, simultaneously, also a terrifying one. What was your process for creating the world?**

Zach: Compositional contrast is key. Playtime Co. was once a joyful place where children's toys were made, and you can still see traces of that. But when you strip away the laughter and light, all that's left is something eerie

IMAGES COURTESY OF MOB ENTERTAINMENT

and unsettling. The duality shows things that were designed to be joyful and fun – but have now become twisted.

Seth: The color palette, music, and designs still hold onto that playful charm, but when things go wrong, they go very wrong. That contrast between whimsy and horror makes *Poppy Playtime* unique and keeps players on edge every step of the way.

How have the world and characters evolved over the four different game chapters?

Zach: Each chapter has introduced new layers to the story and new characters that expand the Playtime Co. universe. What started as a simple escape story has evolved into something much bigger, with deeper backstory, mysteries and connections between characters.

Seth: The horror across each chapter has also evolved. The gameplay has gotten longer, the story darker, visuals more realistic and setting creepier. We've experimented with different types of scares and gameplay mechanics, keeping things fresh while staying true to the core experience. With each chapter, we aim to challenge players in new ways.

What is your process for creating new characters like Yarnaby or PJ Pug-a-Pillar?

Zach: We focus on creating our characters in such a way that the toys actually feel like they could have been authentic toys in real life, toys that feel familiar yet new.

Can you discuss how you craft the scare sequences in the game? is there a method for how you execute such great jump scares in conjunction with gameplay?

Seth: A good scare isn't just about the moment itself; it's about the buildup. We let the tension build, allow players a minute to breathe and ultimately, when they least expect it, hit them with a jump scare. The best horror comes from anticipation, so we focus on atmosphere, pacing, and sound design to make players feel uneasy before anything even happens.

Zach: We also make sure every scare is interactive. Instead of just triggering a cutscene, we want the player to feel like they're in control, whether they need to run, hide, or make split-second decisions. That level of immersion makes the scares hit harder.

We've heard there is a *Poppy Playtime* movie in development. Can you give any details?

Zach: We're working closely with Legendary Entertainment to bring *Poppy Playtime* to the big screen and looking forward to sharing more details down the road.

Seth: We can't reveal much detail, but we're excited to be able to share some updates soon with fans everywhere!

What can we expect for the future of *Poppy Playtime*?

Zach: We have a number of new ways to expand the *Poppy Playtime* universe in the works, whether that's through games, movies, books, animation, or other forms of storytelling. We want to make sure fans have multiple ways to engage. The excitement always comes from official trailers; you'll hear about it when *Poppy* is ready for prime time or rolling out something new.

Seth: Our community has been so dedicated, and we want to keep giving them new experiences that build on what they love. There's definitely more to come in the Playtime Co. universe and beyond! 💀

This interview has been edited for length and clarity. Poppy Playtime *Chapters 1-4 are available across gaming platforms like Steam, Nintendo Switch, XBOX, and PlayStation. Join Huggy Wuggy, Kissy Missy, and all the other smiling critters of* Poppy Playtime *for an amazing adventure that will leave you screaming!*

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DREAD

AND LOVING IT

BY YULISSA MORALES

Hello again, my pretties. The horrors persist, but so do I! And by horrors I just mean endless amounts of horror movies that I can't wait for you to see. It's your girl Yulissa Morales, the VP of US Distribution and Creative over at DREAD. Have you heard about us? Let me refresh your memory in case you were rude and skipped my last column!

JASON BROOKS AS BENNY IN *DIE'CED: RELOADED*.

THE JESTER STAR MICHAEL SHEFFIELD, LEFT, AND DIRECTOR COLIN KRAWCHUK.

I've been asked by the fine folks at Fango to talk to you about indie horror, a topic I usually yell about! So, here you'll learn about what we're working on at DREAD, as well as what other offerings our friends in the indie horror space are cooking up on both the big and small screen.

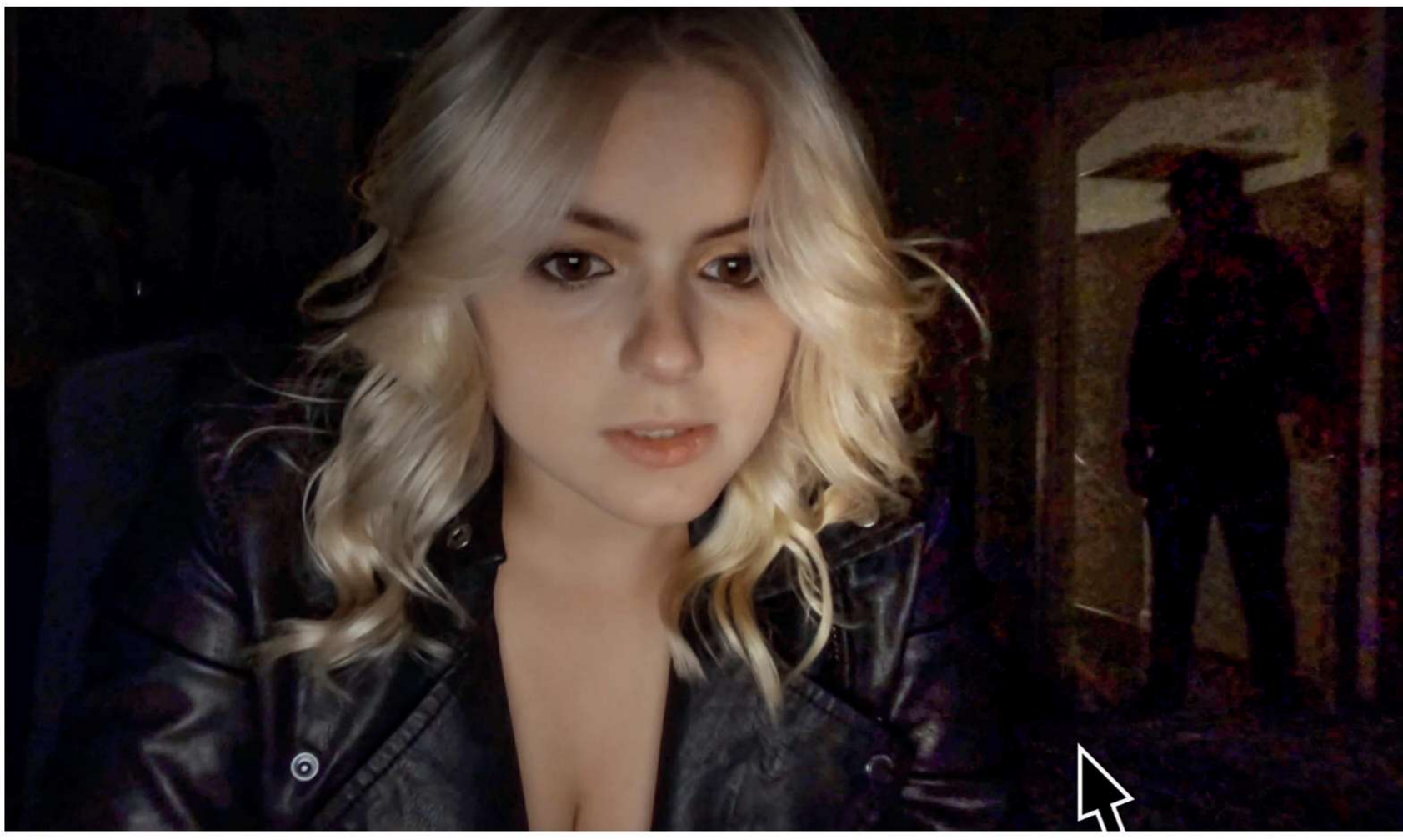
Speaking of screens (seamless transition), the first film I'd like to share with you is *Don't Log Off*, directed by Brandon and Garrett Baer. Starring *Modern Family*'s Ariel Winter, *Don't Log Off* is a long-lost stepsister to the 2020 screen life horror fave *Host*. During a virtual birthday party, Sam vanishes. And when her friends search for clues online, they begin vanishing, too. Who doesn't love a haunted Zoom? Relive all your Work From Home nightmares on July 15th, wherever you rent or buy your movies.

Next up, we are taking a detour to help your new favorite psycho, Benny, escape an asylum on Halloween. What could go wrong? Benny is just trying to live his best life as a masked scarecrow, who is hungry for blood. You may have seen the original short *Die'ced*, but DREAD and director Jeremy Rudd are bringing you more kills and thrills in *Die'ced: Reloaded*. You can rent or buy the film from the comfort of your padded room on August 12th and on Blu-ray September 16th!

If I still have your attention, I'd like to leave you with perhaps the juiciest goss we've got cooking at DREAD! Did you happen to catch *The Jester* on Shudder? Well, if you haven't, now is a good time to get familiar with the very dapper and very freaky titular character as he toys with and murders the inhabitants of a small town. And the goss I promised you? Director Colin Krawchuk just wrapped on the next chapter, *The Jester 2*. And I think we can call that a FANGORIA exclusive?! You just need to stay alive until September 2025 – at which point you are at the mercy of... The Jester (2)!!

That's all for now, long live independent cinema. I'll be back soon with more, but in the meantime, if there's a film, filmmaker, or festival that deserves attention, send it my way: @DreadPresents and @_yulissamora.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DREAD, LEFT: BY ALLEY RUTZEL



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the VIDEO EYE of the SON of DR. CYCLOPS

by Anthony Everitt

PARANOIAC (1963)

It can be easy to paint all '60s post-*Psycho* horror film degenerates with the same brush, excepting Oliver Reed roles, of course. This one boasts a hall-of-fame, baffling/deafening rage explosion at a record nineteen minutes, so overblown you can practically taste the expensive brandy. Worth watching for that alone, honestly. But if you need more reason than that (and I'm not sure that you do), it's a Freddie Francis production, which is a reliable guarantee of tight direction and stunning, atmospheric black-and-white photography (he was the cinematographer on *The Innocents* two years prior.) The writing is also competent, the story developed at a decent pace, with a couple of reversals that deftly subvert audience expectations and deepen the melodrama without cheapening it. The subject of madness and incest is given a lot of weight for a Hammer release, building to a climax that surprised me with its sincerity even if it came short of producing goosebumps.

I won't lie and say that the plot isn't implausibly vague on some points. All the same, it delivers on the creep factor several times. I'm a sucker for the whole disembodied-phantom-music-at-night motif, and unnecessarily creepy masks. Just don't be like me and watch it after finishing a Radcliffe novel. Or do, I'm not your dad. And the obvious lesson here is: don't bequeath a substantial fortune to your troubled teenager. I know it's funny when they stop showering and move in with their speed freak squatter friends, but it always comes back to you once they stash bodies in the walls, doesn't it?

WELL, THIS MASK CERTAINLY HAS **US** FEELING PARANOID.

DON'T BE AFRAID OF THE DARK (1973)

I don't generally cover the Made-for-TV market; it seems to follow its own set of standards and logic which probably requires a more "specialized" approach, but fortunately for you I have no scruples.

At first, it's weird seeing the grotesque, moon-faced child protagonist from *True Grit* playing the emotionally unfulfilled housewife role in a stiff little domestic set piece like this, but when the husband shows up with the personality of an animatronic John Wayne from Disneyland, it somehow feels more natural. I suppose it was a chic move selecting a prepubescent-looking woman to be gaslit by both the preternatural phenomena and men of her life. Whatever the case, it seems that she had a knack for getting herself into tricky situations whenever a relative dies, in this case renovating the spooky old Victorian mansion her grandmother left her.

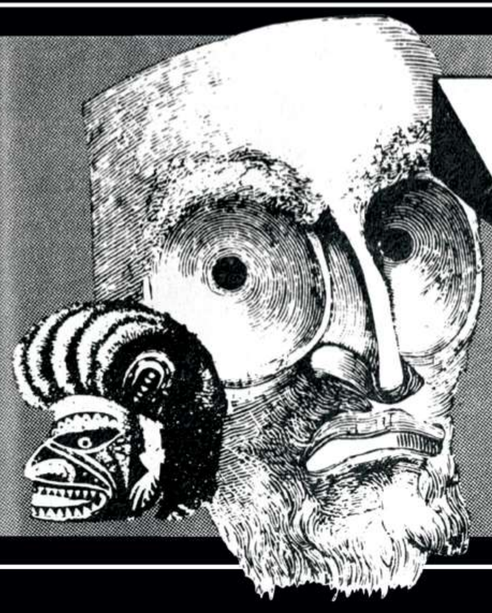
There are certainly some elements of the movie that work in a strange sort of way. The husband's flat affect helps reinforce the wife's isolation and vulnerability, and while that was unintentional, the relatively finessed use of a Chekhov's Gun at the end was not. Unfortunately, the ending as a whole played out just a bit too much like *The Haunting* but with prune-headed, bear-skin jumpsuited Lilliputians as written by an average '70s male. Tragically hamstrung by the conventions of the time, a woman is incapable of breaking a window to unlatch a door and save her friend at the end and instead must wait until a man arrives with the proper chromosomal equipment, all while the sun keeps inexplicably appearing during a night scene. Imaginative scripts and basic continuity aren't for everyone, I suppose.

HOUSE (1985)

Why are lowbrow '80s horror novelists so dissatisfied? Why all the striving for legitimacy? They try to hunker down someplace quiet to get the literary juices flowing when we all know they're just going to unleash the monsters from their subconscious into objective reality, and at that point you can forget about word counts. But if you inherit a creepy house that also happens to be the scene of some personal trauma, then I guess the opportunity's hard to pass up.

Maybe producer Sean Cunningham was trying to elevate his own reputation with an intended satire of said trope, and in some ways, I think he almost succeeded. The constant flow of "crazy" side characters may get a little tedious early on, but every now and then, a joke lands. The late, great George Wendt is predictably playing Norm, and William Katt stays true to his *Greatest American Hero* persona by maintaining a confused and desperate expression for the whole movie. Meanwhile, Richard Moll is there throwing a bone to fans of his *Night Court* work. But this is all academic: we're here for special effects gags and creatures. There's a distinct lack of gore (I frankly don't get the R rating), but the designs and execution are consistently inventive and fresh, so much so that I was surprised to learn that there wasn't a single big name on the crew.

It's not perfect, but anything which so clearly influenced the *Evil Dead* sequels should be required viewing for the discerning. I think I probably shouldn't be walking away from it singing "You're No Good," but whatever turns you on, man.



NIGHTMARE LIBRARY

BY AHLISSA EICHHORN

THE BEWITCHING

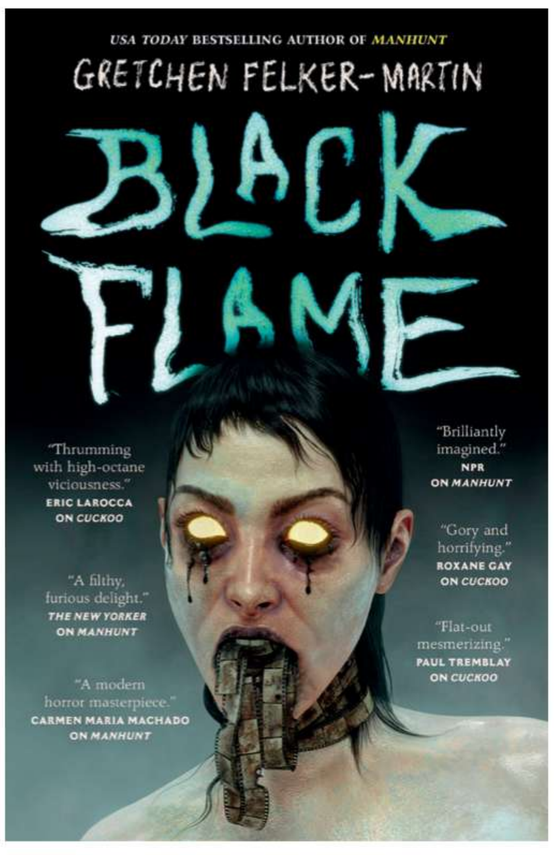
DUE OUT:
7/15/2025

AUTHOR:
Silvia Moreno-Garcia

PUBLISHER:
Del Rey

New England, 1998: Graduate student Minerva is writing her thesis on the work of obscure horror author Beatrice Tremblay. Tremblay's lone novel, *The Vanishing*, was thought to be fiction until Minerva gains access to an unpublished manuscript that reveals an actual disappearance and ensnares her in its mystery. Mexico, 1908: Alba, Minerva's great-grandmother, survives supernatural terror inflicted on her family by unseen forces. Sandwiched between these two timelines is the one contained inside the manuscript: New England, 1934, where Beatrice records the events before her friend vanishes without a trace. All three stories lead to a reality where witches exist and harness formidable powers.

Readers wanting more otherworldly frights will be spoiled by the breadth of elements in *The Bewitching*. Folk magic, spiritualism, specters, and witchcraft never crowd one another thanks to the sprawling timeline. The mix of suggestive and explicit content is well-balanced. Moreno-Garcia easily drifts from suspenseful, perceived danger to nauseating carnage. Grounding all this are the perfectly described settings. Whether it's a freezing East Coast punctuated by dark academia vibes or a beautiful Mexican farmland tainted by tragedy, each story bears a dreamy, gothic atmosphere that fuels its dread. Through storytelling and written word, the protagonists exemplify the strength of women and the notion that knowledge is power. *The Bewitching* is a beguiling, multicultural horror pulsing with mystery and treachery. Its folklore creeps into modern day, binding impossible fears to everyday threats. It respects the duality of witches and presents magic as the terrible, wondrous force it truly is.



BLACK FLAME

DUE OUT:
8/05/2025

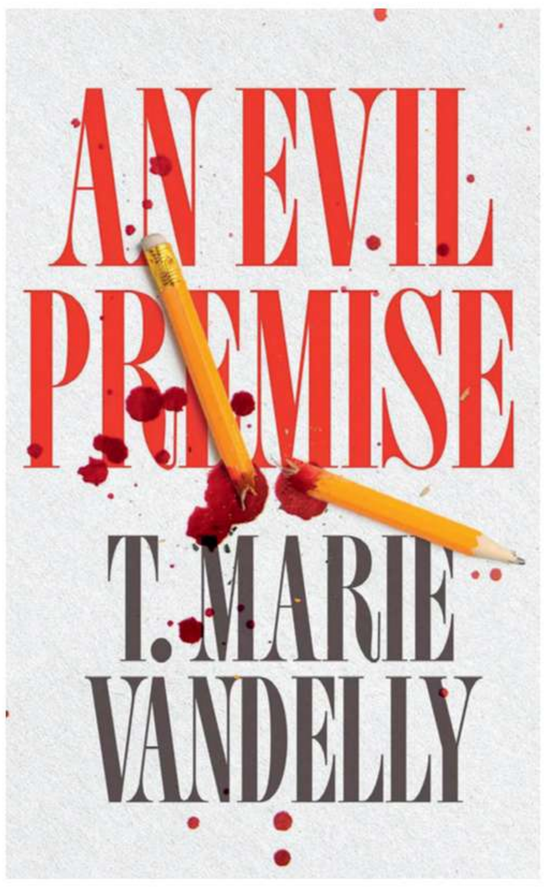
AUTHOR:
Gretchen Felker-Martin

PUBLISHER:
Tor Nightfire

Quiet, misunderstood Ellen restores old films at a failing archive in 1980s New York City. When her company decides to restore a scandalous exploitation film thought to be destroyed during the Holocaust, she begins experiencing strange, volatile feelings. Its queer debauchery and ghoulish occult acts force her to confront her own deeply repressed homosexuality. Through the confusion and frustration, she knows the bizarre film is real and the devils trapped in it are leaking out into her world.

Black Flame is one of the most assaulting reads around when it comes to sights and smells. Felker-Martin is the queen of gross-out sensory experiences, for her descriptions are all substance and no filler. This is a great asset for a story jam-packed with raw emotion and sexuality. The novel's faux film is akin to a queer, pornographic *Häxan* in vampy drag; it seriously jumps off the page. The harmony of horror and eroticism is turbulent, but there is more than enough depraved, mind-splitting terror to make a Cenobite chitter in ecstasy. Its dark, sexual tone grows more sinister as it ruminates on suppression and the pain of being othered. Readers are copilots to Ellen's heartbreaking torment as the ignorance and cruelty of her loved ones drive her further into the arms of the repulsive hallucinations unraveling her psyche. The effect is surreal and beyond disturbing. As horrible as it is horny, *Black Flame* is a psychosexual horror of deviancy and transformation that packs the nastiest punch. The squeamish need not apply.

PHYSICAL MEDIA: HORROR FANS CAN'T GET ENOUGH OF IT. BUT WE'RE NOT TALKING ABOUT COLLECTORS HERE. This Nightmare Library entry focuses on the fictional media that our beloved horror stories hinge upon. Cursed films, forbidden books, and all the sketchy sources of knowledge that will inevitably spark the end of the world or summon something unspeakable. There is much, much harm to be found by simply popping in a tape or opening a book (or magazine).



AN EVIL PREMISE

DUE OUT:
8/12/2025

AUTHOR:
T. Marie Vandelly

PUBLISHER:
Blackstone Publishing

Famous fantasy author Deidre Baldwin has been hospitalized, and her less-than-successful self-published sister Jewel arrives to take care of her affairs, including the weird horror manuscript she's almost completed called *Unspeakable Demons*. Its main character is also a struggling writer, one with unsettling and murderous thoughts. Jewel starts to wonder if the sentient manuscript is responsible for her sister's injuries, and soon Jewel herself notices the powerful effect it has on her.

An Evil Premise is flat-out insane. Reading a horror book about a woman finding an evil book that's about a woman writing an evil book is already a squirrelly idea, but the hilarious and terrifying stunts the protagonist does pulls readers into the spiral almost too easily. The nesting doll effect is uncanny, and the fourth wall could break at any moment. Vandelly has a ton of fun using metaphors, decorating every page with palatable paranoia and visual muck. Her uncouth protagonist acts as a mouthpiece for every pissed off author out there as she rages against the publishing industry. Losing control of her limbs and laughter leads to her going postal à la *Evil Dead*, *Idle Hands*, and ruthless religious horror films. Even at almost 400 pages, the story never loses speed; there are too many juicy anecdotes from this deluded tale to ever get slow. The addictive concept guiltlessly self-indulges and serves up a twist so violent it's bound to snap something in the reader. *An Evil Premise* is simply the most fun you'll have losing your mind – *erm*, reading a book!

THE OCTOBER FILM HAUNT

DUE OUT:
9/30/2025

AUTHOR:
Michael Wehunt

PUBLISHER:
St. Martin's Press

Jorie and her two friends used to run The October Film Haunt, a blog dedicated to exploring the filming locations of their favorite scary movies. But everything went south after their post about *Proof of Demons*, the most notorious cult film ever. The damned film supposedly contained instructions for a ritual, one that innocent people died from while attempting. Ten years later, Jorie receives a videotape in the mail. On it is footage from *Proof of Demons*, but it's somehow new – different. That snuffed curiosity is rekindled in her, but so are her defenses. Someone is filming her, taunting her. It's then she realizes that the movie is getting a sequel, and she's the final girl.

A cursed film seems like a dream come true to some horror fans, but *The October Film Haunt* proves what an actual fucking nightmare that'd be. The novel strings together several subgenres without a hitch. The '70s occult aspects radiate psychotropic fear and uncertainty. Slasher and stalker components tap into its corporeal side. Think *Antrum* and *The Blair Witch Project* injected with the self-referentiality of *Scream*. Wehunt's chilling, spot-on imagery and descriptive prose are what really sell this ambitious concept. But the scariest part of the novel is how he demonstrates the wildfire effect of social media. Through its influence and the creepypasta phenomena, the real monster is collective belief and manifestation. *The October Film Haunt* is the kind of shiver you can't shake off. It's a layered slow-burn that speaks of obsession, fandom and the lethal itch to know the truth.

Contributors' Crypt

Our talented roster of contributors have lots going on besides Fango bylines! Check out their Instagram feeds, but keep it chill and don't embarrass us, for God's sake.

Sean Abley ..... @gay_of_the_dead

Meredith Borders ..... @mereborders

Brian W. Collins ..... @brianwcollins

Barbara Crampton .. @barbaracrampton

Ahlissa Eichhorn .. @hauntedbydeadlines

Isaac Feldberg ..... @ijfeldberg

Brendan Haley ..... @brendanhaley

Jennifer Love Hewitt @jenniferlovehewitt

Stephen Graham Jones ..... @stephengrahamjones

Rebekah McKendry .@rebekahmckendry

Angel Melanson ..... @itsanhel

Yulissa Morales ..... @_yulissamora

Richard Newby ..... @rnewb

Freddie Prinze ..... @realfreddieprinze

Amber T ..... @hornbloodfire

Rocco T. Thompson ..@rosemarys_gayby

Michael Varrati ..... @michaelvarrati

CLASSIFIED AD VAULT

Start them young. Happy Birthday to a Fango die-hard in the making - Simi! Watching *Final Destination Bloodlines* on your birthday eve was wickedly fun. Life is precious, enjoy every single second...

You always save documentaries about haunted houses or scary movies on your DVR for me. That means a lot to me, that you care about what I care about.

Here's to scanning each other in this life and the next! I love you Kenzie and I'm so proud to see you take over the world.

Cheers to Brett, gone too soon and I'll miss the old days of late nights and horror movies. He'd have loved to see his name in FANGORIA.

Thanks for always saying yes to adventure with me ;)

The Carolina Fear Fest NEEDS Fango to attend and PLEASE get David Dastmalchian as a guest!

You may know the tale of Sweeney Todd, but what of the tale of Mrs. Lovett? The Butcher's Daughter, a grisly new literary horror by David Demchuk and Corinne Leigh Clark, from Soho Press US and Titan Books UK. Serving customers May 2025.

Play Swamp, cast Dark Ritual, cast Necropotence, use Bolas' Citadel to look at top of deck, Necro to exile it, use Bolas' Citadel to look and cast Toxic Deludge from top of deck.

Are you the parent/guardian of a child who loves horror? Seeking participants ages 9-15 (in UK/Ireland) to 1) participate in a PhD study on children's opinions of horror or 2) are interested in making their own horror short. Email: x.k.pajarillo@bham.ac.uk

Happy birthday Bridgett, Mom, Jason, and Meredith! You are some of the ultimate MVP's of my life and I am so lucky to love you all.

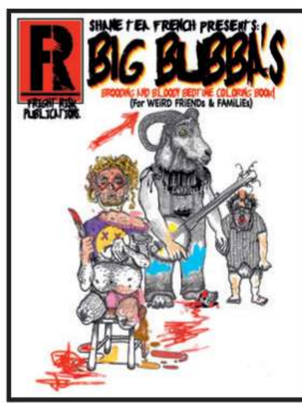
'Palena 'ole ku'u mahalo nou e 'anake Ne'e Ne'e' • Thank you for always believing in us, Aunty Ne'e Ne'e. - Bella & Lowell

Happy birthday, Arvinda
- Dan Stevens (probably)

Thank you to all the rad and wonderful people at Texas Frightmare Weekend! See y'all next year. - Jason K.

Keep circulating the tapes.

I sneaked a Taylor Swift lyric into this issue. See if you can find it.



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Things to Come

FANGORIA #29 is coming to make your fall even cooler, and to do that we're bringing you coverage on THE BLACK PHONE 2, Guillermo del Toro's FRANKENSTEIN (which apparently is Not A Horror Movie), and the debut feature from the daughter of one of horror's all-timers. So look alive (or at least undead) when Fango's fall issue heads your way this October!

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